Judaism, Environmentalism and the Environment
Mapping and Analysis

Manfred Gerstenfeld
Where do the compatibilities and the tensions between Judaism and modern environmentalism lie? What are the differences between their values? Does Judaism have a message for environmentalists? How does it view nature? Is Judaism anthropocentric? These are a few of the many issues dealt with by the author.

The interaction of Judaism and modern environmentalism has religious, philosophical, sociological, cultural and political aspects. While this study focuses on classical Jewish writings, it also touches upon these other areas. Bible, Talmud, Midrash literature and Responsa provide perspectives on the Jews' relationship with living nature, their attitude toward animals, use of natural resources, the effects of pollution and nuisance on third parties, and issues pertinent to the allocation of space.

The study also reviews Jewish publications of the past decades since the emergence of environmentalism as a mainstream concern of modern society. This debate on Judaism's attitude toward the environment has been largely unstructured, reflecting a wide range of positions from the attitudes of 'catastrophists' to those of 'contrarians'.

The author's strategic approach, based on seeing various Jewish – environmental interactions as part of a whole, demonstrates the advantages of the introduction of a distinct new field of research: Jewish environmental studies.
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The author's strategic approach, based on seeing various Jewish – environmental interactions as part of a whole, demonstrates the advantages of the introduction of a distinct new field of research: Jewish environmental studies.
1) In the Bible, as well as in the Talmud and other rabbinical sources, references are made to many matters now considered environmental ones. Reading these together provides a balanced picture of the classical Jewish views on these issues, and shows that Judaism does not take them lightly.

(This thesis)

2) There is substantial scope for the expansion of contemporary environmental Halakha.

(This thesis)

3) The discussion on whether Judaism is anthropocentric or biocentric is misplaced as classical Judaism is theocentric.

(This thesis)

4) The many categories of Judaism-environment interaction make the creation of a new academic field of Jewish environmental studies worthwhile.

(This thesis)

5) Lynn White's oft-quoted article on the historical origins of modern environmental problems betrays ignorance of essential elements of classical Judaism.

(Lynn White Jr., The historical roots of our ecologic crisis. Science, 155, March 10, 1967, 1203–7.)

6) In developing countries a significant number of environmental problems can be attenuated without major costs.


7) Zero pollution means almost zero human life.


8) Jewry has reasons to watch which direction the powerful, renewed worldwide interest in nature will take: particular causes for
concern are neo-paganism’s focus on nature and the ideological focus of extreme environmentalist currents.

(Manfred Gerstenfeld, Neo-paganism in the public square and its relevance to Judaism. Jerusalem Letter/Viewpoints, No. 392, October 15, 1998.)

9) The development of Jerusalem as an environmentally sustainable city could be a policy instrument in attenuating political tensions in the city.

(Manfred Gerstenfeld, Jerusalem’s Future as a Sustainable City. JCT Perspective, April, 1997, pp. 12-14.)

10) The application of business analysis methods to a variety of political problems – in addition to regular political analysis – can provide better insights in future political developments.


11) Israel’s dealing with terrorist violence can serve as a ‘laboratory of the future’ for the Western world.


12) Italy neglects a major potential economic resource: its Diaspora.


13) The increasing improvement and cost reduction of new communication technologies may reproduce a situation similar to that which pertained when European universities began: the best pupils and best teachers in a field will be able to interact.


14) New perspectives for Western European passenger railway strategies can be developed using a thinking model based on a scenario which begins with the non-existence of railways in modern society.


15) In order to set a worldwide example of environmentally concerned behavior, the United Nations should replace all their meetings with video-conferences. The same goes for all international meetings dealing with the environment.
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JUDAISM, ENVIRONMENTALISM AND THE ENVIRONMENT

Mapping and Analysis

Manfred Gerstenfeld
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I hope that this work will be of value to others and contribute to the field.
Introduction

This study discusses and reviews a broad question: “How does Judaism view modern environmentalism and environmental matters?”

Environmentalism as we know it today has developed as a mainstream interest only in the latter half of this century. The significant hold which the subject of ‘environment’ has taken on global thinking in recent decades is the motive for this study.

Definitions

‘Judaism’ can be defined for the purposes of this study as the world of thought of Jews – especially its religious aspects – and the precepts for action which flow therefrom. To a lesser extent, attention is given here to Judaism’s cultural and national thought.

‘Environmental matters’ include several areas, the main ones being man’s relation with living nature, his attitude and behavior toward animals, the use of natural resources, the effects of pollution and nuisance on third parties, and issues pertinent to the allocation of space. This broad variety of issues gives rise to the complex and fragmented environmental discourse.

‘Modern environmentalism’ refers to the world of thought and action of those currents and individuals who consider protection of the ecosystem or the environment a central goal of society. Its time frame relates mainly to the last thirty-five years.

Aim of this study

In identifying Jewish attitudes to modern environmentalism, this study starts from and focuses on contemporary Jewish writings and the many references quoted in them from the Bible, Talmud etc. The relevant material is dispersed over many publications in several languages, and has been collected and reviewed for this purpose.

This study aims firstly to analyze the material on modern environmentalism and environmental issues written by Jewish authors in their capacity as Jews, spanning the past 25–30 years.

The study’s second, equally important, aim is to explore how classical Judaism views environmental issues. This goal originates in the fact that a number of matters which, today, are considered environmental have long had a place in Judaism.
As the corpus of classical material is vast, this study refers mainly—but not exclusively—to those sources quoted in modern Jewish writings. This is particularly the case with respect to Halakha (Jewish Law), as a wide range of environmentally relevant Halakhot is mentioned by contemporary writers. This view is complemented by reviewing other large areas of the world of classic Jewish thought, i.e. the Bible's non-legal texts, their interpretation in later rabbinical sources and other non-legal rabbinical material.

Disorganization

The subject to be covered is huge and disorganized for a number of reasons. One is that modern environmentalism is not only fragmented, but sometimes even atomized as regards the issues it deals with. Another reason is that contemporary Jewish writings on the subject of environmentalism have little common basis. Many are by writers from the United States. While Judaism everywhere is heterogeneous, in that country it has a strong multi-denominational character. Yet another reason for the disorganization is that, within classical Judaism, the references to issues now considered environmental are scattered over many places.

Method

The subject of this study's inquiries is thus complex and dispersed. Before developing methods for investigating the 'Jewish environmental garden', it must first be established by gathering a number of reasonably representative plants together. There is little or no organized material giving an overview of the subjects which the various chapters of this study refer to.

This situation prescribes the steps in this study. First the subject has to be put on the map. Its key components will be described and, thereafter, elements of these will be chosen for further examination. This will be followed by the selection of methods and tools for the analysis. Thereafter, classical texts are selected that have environmental relevance.

To avoid misunderstanding: the application of the approach of any modern discipline to ancient situations does not imply that the people living at that time viewed issues as we do today. Thus I am not claiming that these texts were seen as environmentally relevant when they were written, or that their environmental relevance, when recognized at the time of writing, was the same as it is now.

This study attempts to reach its goals through a strategic—rather than a systematic—analysis of classical Jewish texts. This means obtaining an overall or macro-view of the subject based on a cross-
section of issues, without going into much detail by analyzing under­
lying components.

Moreover, like all overall pictures, the perspective drawn here is
not critically dependent on individual elements of support. It may
be expected to undergo only limited change by the study of additional
material. Furthermore, the conclusions reached tend to rest on con­sensus rather than on highly disputed issues.

Within the areas selected for study, a number of categories of
environmental issues will be defined and examples given thereof.
From an integrated analysis of the subject, a macro-picture will
emerge of where Judaism stands on issues which are now included
in the environmental field. Suggestions for further research will be
made.

Connecting two different worlds

Judaism refers predominantly to how Jews should behave. Classical
Judaism not only represents a much older world of thought than that
of modern environmentalism: it is also a radically different one. This
raises the question of how one can transpose concepts from one
world of ideas to another, very different, one.

Here the approach taken is to link classical texts to broad categories
of currently relevant environmental problems. In doing so, it will
emerge that ancient Jewish society had many laws which now would
be defined as environmental. With regard to ideas, a variety of motifs
and pre-occupations which have become explicit in modern environ­
mentalism were expressed in the religious sphere of classical Jewish
thought.

The areas of interaction

After a description of the development and characteristics of mod­
ern environmentalism, Chapter One identifies the areas where Juda­
ism and the environmental sphere touch or interact. The two main
fields here are politics and religion. While opening a window on the
first, the study concentrates on the latter. History and sociology are
also areas of relevance and, occasionally, there are as well literary
aspects. These other areas will only be dealt with very briefly.

Furthermore, it will be seen in Chapter One that modern Jewish
writers relating to the religious views of Judaism broadly fall into
two categories: those who base themselves on present-day continuity
of classical Judaism, and those who do so only very partially. This
study focuses on the first category of writings.

For a better understanding of contemporary Jewish attitudes toward
environmentalism, Chapter Two reviews the various motives of mod­
ern Jewish writers in dealing with the subject. Thereafter, it particularly addresses how they view the compatibility of Judaism and modern environmentalism. This chapter also deals with those points in modern environmentalism which create unease in Jewish circles.

These include claims that the Torah (and thus, Judaism) legitimizes man's exploitation of nature for his own ends, certain neo-pagan elements in environmentalism, the similarities in some environmentalists' approach to the Nazis' love of animals and nature combined with their hatred of certain humans, the relatively strong position of a Green political party in Germany and the anti-Israeli attitude of some Green politicians.

Chapter Two also summarizes and critically reviews Jewish reactions to the spoliation of nature debate. It describes Jewish agendas in the environmental field, as proposed by some writers. It also provides a reflection on the Jewish Orthodox attitudes toward modern environmentalism as well as modernity in general. Furthermore, it investigates to what extent there is common ground in modern Jewish writings on environmental issues.

In the chapters thereafter, the study focuses on how classical Judaism views environmental issues.

The main field of investigation in Chapter Three will be that of Jewish law, as the halakhic system largely determines the observant Jew's behavior toward the environment. This chapter examines halakhic texts from the Bible, the Talmud and later rabbinical literature, highlighting items which are now included in the environmental field. Chapter Three deals in more detail with issues such as nature protection, sustainability, health protection, animal welfare, pollution prevention and environmental hygiene.

Most of the modern Jewish writers reviewed here who refer to Halakha have a strong base in Judaism, but often are not very familiar with modern environmentalist thought. Thus, they focus on obvious issues such as the commandment not to destroy fruit trees, to leave the land fallow in the seventh year, the structure of the Levite cities and the Jewish attitude toward animals.

It will be shown that a body of Jewish environmental law, which is environmental by current standards, has existed for many centuries, albeit not concentrated in a single codex. Furthermore, modern issues such as the conflict between environmental and economic interests, the concept of internalizing externalities, and that of the sustainable city have precursors in Halakha. Indications will also be given as to how contemporary Halakha deals with some environmental problems, and suggestions made with respect to further potential developments in Jewish law of relevance to the subject.
In Chapter Four approaches will be defined for analyzing the main non-halakhic elements in the Bible and what these may reveal with regard to environmental issues. Jewish attitudes to nature and several other environmental matters will be assessed as they emerge in the Bible’s narrative and – to some extent – in the classical Jewish commentators discussing this. Some reference is also made to the Bible’s prophetic and wisdom literature.

Modern Jewish writers provide us with very few environmentalist interpretations of Bible stories. However, from the environmentalist viewpoint, some Biblical stories (such as man in the Garden of Eden and the Flood) can be considered almost as environmental paradigms. Others, such as the story of the ten plagues, have numerous environmental aspects. In view of the scarcity of material in modern Jewish writings relevant to the environmental aspects of the Bible’s narrative, I have attempted to expand the views of current Jewish literature with some from my own perspective.

Chapter Five analyzes some additional environmental motifs from the classical Jewish religious literature. It deals mainly with Aggadah material, i.e. those elements of rabbinical scriptural interpretation which are essentially non-halakhic in character. A variety of motifs are identified which demonstrate ancient Jewish interest in issues which today are part of environmentalism. This includes issues such as the need to ‘keep the world intact’, avoiding conspicuous consumption, protecting biodiversity, compassion for animals, the importance of tree-planting and intergenerational equity.

The Conclusions chapter focuses on three broad issues: the Jewish view on God, man and the environment; the relationship between Judaism and modern environmentalism, and the potential of Jewish environmental studies.

Numerous issues are raised in the course of this strategic analysis which merit more detailed study than is possible in this survey. Thus from time to time, this study opens windows on issues, without being able to probe them deeply. Some reference to these is necessary, however, as they have to be taken into account within the framework of defining the overall attitudes of Judaism to the environment.
Notes for Introduction

1 One definition of 'ecosystem' is: "Ecosystems are the combination of populations of plants and animals, the interactions between them and their non-living surroundings."
2 The environment includes the fields described above when referring to 'environmental matters'.
3 Chapter One will discuss in more detail the characteristics and development of modern environmentalism.
4 A definition of 'Jewish' writings as used in this study will be given in Chapter One.
5 Often I have preferred to insert quotations - rather than circumscribe the texts - because, in a field like this, the nuance of the original words contributes to clearer understanding.
6 The term 'classical Judaism' has been used in this study to describe Halakha-based Judaism as it existed before the emancipation of the Jews in the 19th century, and those sources which have continued the Halakha-based tradition since.
7 For the purpose of this study the term 'strategic approach' has been borrowed from the field of business, where it has been developed most over the last decades. My first undertaking in this study was to define the most important 'goals to be achieved': in this case, to characterize the essentials of the broad, vague field of environmentalism, concentrating mainly on salient elements. Within this study 'a few key concepts' have been developed to achieve these goals. The main categories of environmental Halakha have been reviewed and the resulting findings refined by integrating this analysis with that of non-halakhic parts of the Bible, classic Jewish commentators thereon and the Aggadah. In this way, this study aims to reach a 'cohesive whole'. For a description of business strategy, see: James Brian Quinn, Strategies for Change. In: James Brian Quinn, Henry Mintzberg & Robert M. James, The Strategy Process: Concepts, Contexts, and Cases. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1988, p. 3.
8 This means that the overall conclusions of this study would not have changed substantially by deleting or adding additional material such as halakhic rules, Bible texts or Midrashim.
9 While the experts in a particular field often focus on its inner contradictions, the strategist, who has a broader and more detached vantage point, attempts first to see the field's most salient features.
10 Anna Bramwell analyzes the possible reasons for attacks against the German Greens, which accuse them of being 'potential terrorists and anti-Semites'. She mentions that "one such attack was from Israel's ambassador to Bonn in 1984, after Greens planned to meet the PLO." Anna Bramwell, Ecology in the 20th Century: A History. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989, p. 224.
Chapter One

The Touching Points Between Judaism and Modern Environmentalism

Where does Judaism meet with environmentalism? What are the major categories of this interaction? These are the main issues which this chapter intends to answer.

Several aspects of modern environmentalism inspire interest and/or caution in contemporary Jewish writers. In order to understand these better, some attention has to be given to the historic development and major characteristics of modern environmentalism.

I. Modern Environmentalism

As stated in the previous chapter, 'modern environmentalism' refers to the world of thought and action of those currents and individuals who consider protection of the ecosystem or the environment a central goal for society. It began on the fringes of society, but in the past decades several of its key elements have become part of Western mainstream thinking, with environmental matters increasingly drawing worldwide attention.

The precursors of modern environmentalism or ‘the ecology movement’ emerged in the 19th century. Anna Bramwell locates the origins of normative ecology in the latter half of that century, but also refers to earlier proponents, such as Thoreau. She claims that “today’s Greens, in Britain, Europe and North America, have emerged from a politically radicalized ecologism, based on the shift from mechanistic to vitalist thought in the late 19th century.”

Movements stressing the importance of nature conservation existed in many countries in the last century. Ideas embodied in modern environmentalism can be traced back much further, particularly interest in health protection, resource conservation, animal protection and some types of pollution control. As will emerge from this study, the Bible contains many references to issues that we currently call environmental.

From the margins to the mainstream

The emergence of environmentalism as a mainstream field of concern is linked to the development of the industrial/mass consumption
society. The publication in 1962 of Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* is often considered the point from which environmentalism, until then still on the margins of society's consciousness, started to take on mass appeal, and consolidate into a sizable sphere of interest.

In her book, Carson drew attention to the dangers inherent in the spread of synthetic pesticides, which "have been so thoroughly distributed throughout the animate and inanimate world that they occur virtually everywhere." ⁶

The move that environmentalism has taken toward the mainstream has manifested itself in many ways, as illustrated by a number of events of global importance. In 1972, the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP) was established after an international conference in Stockholm. Early in the 1970s also, the U.S. government established the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). This agency has not only played the central role in the development of the United States government's environmental policies, but has also assisted many foreign governments in the initial phases of their environmental policy formulation. In addition, the 1970s saw the adoption of an international convention on the protection of endangered wildlife.⁷

In 1983 the UN established the World Commission on Environment and Development. This independent body, headed by the then Norwegian prime minister Gro Harlem Brundtland, was asked to evaluate the problematic interaction of environment and development. Its report, *Our Common Future*, was presented in 1987.⁸

Several international conventions were signed through the 1980s. One of these, the Montreal Protocol of 1987 on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer, limited the production of the chemicals mainly held responsible for the growing hole in the stratospheric ozone layer. In 1989, the Basle convention committed exporting OECD countries to apply severe rules for waste exports to the Third World.

This trend has continued in the 1990s. The UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, signed in 1992, came into force in 1994. Another agreement adopted in 1992 was the Convention on Biological Diversity.

In 1989 an opinion poll in what were then the 12 countries of the European Economic Community, showed how much headway environmental concern had made. Those interviewed were asked to list what they considered the five major national and international problems facing the EEC. Of those polled, 94% said the environmental issue was "very important". Only unemployment scored slightly higher. The environment was well ahead of the other issues cited, which included stable prices, personal security, arms control, terrorism and reform of health care systems.⁹
Another indication of the strong international interest in environmental matters was the celebration of the 20th anniversary of Earth Day, on April 22, 1990. An estimated 200 million supporters took to the streets around the world. According to one source “Earth Day 1990 united more people concerned about a single issue cause than any other global event in history.”

What is popularly known as the Earth Summit, the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) in Rio de Janeiro, drew more attention worldwide than any other environmental meeting before or since. This conference became the largest gathering of heads of states ever to take place.

This interest in environmental issues does not necessarily express the willingness of either governments or individuals to practice what they preach. Despite their undeniable objective relevance, environmental problems also have a significant ‘fashionable’ character, and showing concern about them belongs to the world of ‘political correctness’. On the government level, moreover, the participants’ inability to reach major concrete decisions at the UN “Rio Plus Five” meeting in New York in June 1997 demonstrated the lack of political consensus on the subject.

One major new element which has emerged in environmentalism in recent decades is the dramatic fear that humanity is doing irreversible harm both to the immediate environment and to life on earth in general. This damage is not the result of a major activity such as nuclear war, but of a great number of largely unrelated actions carried out all over the globe.

The times have also shown a shift in public attention regarding environmental issues. This has differed from country to country. Alvin Alm, a former deputy administrator of the EPA, defines three distinct periods of environmental attitudes in the U.S., “the most recent of which regards the global environment.”

**Continued development of environmentalism**

Environmentalism continues to develop in a large variety of directions – philosophical and ethical, political and practical. The relationship between these is often unclear. This makes it difficult to predict where modern environmentalism is heading.

Among those who are boycotting an oil company for wanting to dump a platform in the North Sea, almost no one is concerned with the arguments between biocentrists and sociocentrists. The discussion as to whether the German philosopher Martin Heidegger should be considered a precursor of the radical environmentalist current of deep ecology, is of no interest to the vast majority of those who
advocate the recycling of paper. They most probably ignore what that term means, and who Heidegger was.\textsuperscript{15}

The perception varies as to what environmentalism is or should be. Few people consider that it should be developed as a fully-fledged ideological alternative to the market economy. Among those who do is the American political scientist Robert C. Paehlke, who claims that environmentalism must develop clear and consistent platforms on the full range of political and social issues. Its key characteristic should be that it “is an ideology distinctive first in its unwillingness to maximize economic advantages for its own adherents, or for any contemporary group.”\textsuperscript{16} No major political current in any part of the Western world subscribes to such a thesis.

\textit{Where to locate environmentalism politically}

The situation in the political arena is equally confused. Most Western political parties have an environmental platform today, although their actual commitment varies greatly.

It is also unclear where to locate environmental politics in the political spectrum. ‘Green’ political parties have different interests and approaches in different European countries. The Greens’ participation in coalitions with social democrats in Germany, with the left of center parties in Italy and with socialists and communists in France seemingly identifies environmental politics with those European parties that like to call themselves ‘progressive’.

Several writers view the ‘natural’ place of environmental activists in the political spectrum from their own perspective. However, even if they address the issue at different periods it seems that the arguments for their diverging and incomplete conclusions still stand today.

Historian Walter Laqueur states with respect to Germany that, “most members of the Green Party consider themselves to the left of the Social Democrats without being Marxist.” However, he adds, “Much of the Green program can be accepted with equal ease by people from the right and the left of the political spectrum. It has not come as a surprise therefore that the extreme right has been active among them.”\textsuperscript{17} Laqueur does not consider the German Greens “a political party in the traditional sense”.\textsuperscript{18}

The latter view is echoed by the French philosopher Luc Ferry: “One asks often whether environmentalism is a full-fledged political force, whether it is legitimate that it constitutes itself as a party and in that case has the vocation to exercise power in all the traditional sectors of government activity. This is what the Greens want. I believe that they are wrong.”\textsuperscript{19}
In the 1970s, Marxist philosopher and environmentalist Andre Gorz considered that environmentalist demands “are specifically an indispensable dimension of the anti-capitalist struggle. Only the socialist and self-governing left can politically take care of these demands. It is not yet there, neither in its practice, nor in its program. That is why the ecology movement has to continue to affirm its specificity and its autonomy.”

The views of a significant number of environmentalists show elements of wishing to return to an idealized past, which might label them as reactionary. Bramwell considers that “today’s ecological movement is in favor of a return to primitivism.”

Defining environmentalism

For some people environmentalism is a universalist ideology concerning the relationship between man and nature, with far-reaching consequences not only for their own lifestyle, but also for how they want others to live.

Environmentalism can also be described as a value system. This definition is not generally accepted, however, due to the lack of cohesion among the environmentalist currents. Arguments in favor of this definition include that it aggregates around certain values which may be either beliefs or opinions. These hold in common the view that the protection of the environment (including natural resources and ecosystems) should be a or the central goal of society.

Avner de-Shalit, of the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, calls environmentalism a “scientifically-based philosophy”. One can also consider it the promoter of the environmental discipline. For example, in its confrontations on specific issues with the discipline of economics, it has a distinct method of analysis, with its own values, tools and indicators. It also has several partly-consolidated methodologies such as the environmental audit, environmental impact assessment, life cycle analysis and various types of risk evaluation.

A more limited description of environmentalism is as a family of rather divergent beliefs and/or opinions emphasizing environmental matters.

For many others, environmentalism is a pragmatic approach to protecting one’s health, to removing waste and preventing pollution as well as eliminating other threats to humankind, wildlife and the inanimate.

Who represents environmentalism?

There is no single body representative for modern environmentalism which is still in great flux; nor does it have a single,
recognized spokesman. There are several worldwide movements, such as Greenpeace, Friends of the Earth and the World Wildlife Fund, as well as Green parties in a number of countries. However, none of these can claim to be the authorized representative of environmentalism. Furthermore, no collection of principles or authoritative book explains its concepts. There is no 'green' equivalent of *Das Kapital* (or *Mein Kampf*); it has no Vatican or Kremlin to refer to for teaching or instructions.

The organized nucleus of modern environmentalism is embodied in various non-governmental organizations and a number of national parties, several of which also participate in the European Parliament. Some of the non-governmental organizations are represented at the highest international levels, such as United Nations conferences and bodies.

In the supranational bodies and meetings they hold positions which have clear limits, if compared with the positions of others such as the business world or other political parties.

**Environmentalism's boundaries**

Some environmentalists would like to dictate how the world should function. These include social engineers wishing to redesign national and international policies with a totalitarian slant. Others are worried that concern for the environment does "not imply the rejection of authoritarian, techno-fascist solutions," as Gorz explains, basing himself on the analysis of another radical philosopher, Ivan Illich.

Gorz adds that "environmentalism uses ecology as the lever of a radical critique of this civilization and this society. But ecology can also be used in order to exalt applied engineering of living systems."

Wanting us to radically change the way we behave, move and consume, the environmentalists attempt to influence both government and corporate policies. On some issues they have been extremely successful. However, none makes a systematic organizational effort to try to rule the world.

Still other activists are interested only in one single cause; for instance, stopping the construction of a municipal incinerator or a highway near their home. The practical concerns of environmentalists thus range from the worldwide level, such as preventing global warming or the deterioration of the stratospheric ozone layer to the personal level, right down to the neighbor's Rottweiler dog or the cigarette in his mouth.

The boundaries of environmentalism are also not very clear. Some consider animal rightists and animal protectionists to be outside the community of environmentalists. They are organized in movements
which only partly overlap with the general environmentalist groups. I consider their motives and aims sufficiently similar to warrant inclusion, as animals are part of the ecosystem. In the analysis of general Jewish attitudes to environmental matters, and particularly within the context of this study, excluding this subject would affect the conclusions reached, as many modern Jewish writings refer to both issues in a way which makes separation difficult.

One general conclusion can be drawn from the above: due to its diversity and fragmentation, or even atomization, environmentalism is difficult to characterize.

If one cannot define or even understand environmentalism well it is hard to form a balanced opinion on its multiple aspects. Nor does it facilitate effective discussion. Still one can define the areas that are of concern to environmentalism: relations with nature, protection of natural resources, pollution/nuisance, allocation of space, relations with animals. These will provide a framework for the analysis later in this study.

II. Judaism’s Interactions with Environmentalism

Since the 1960s, a few books and an unspecified number of articles by Jewish writers have referred to various aspects of the interaction between Judaism and environmentalism.

The books include bibliographies or surveys of classical Jewish sources referring to the environment, with little overall analytical content, and a number of publications which refer to the Jewish attitude toward animal welfare. The articles touch not only on the main subjects treated in this study but also on issues as diverse as environmental ethics, theology, animal rights, Zionism, the greening of Jewish communities, Jewish eco-feminism and many other aspects of the complex and fragmented environmental discourse.

These Jewish writers have taken very varied positions. For all that it has grown over four millennia around a common tradition, contemporary Judaism is heterogeneous, reflecting a spectrum of religious concepts, identities and organizational structures. It speaks with many mouths, but not all writers are equally authoritative. Some are prominent scholars; others are laymen. Many speak only for themselves.

What is a Jewish attitude?

This study focuses first of all on contemporary Jewish writings discussing environmental issues. What can be considered a ‘Jewish reaction’ to environmentalism (if such a clear-cut classification can
be made)? In the framework of this study, 'Jewish reactions' to the interaction of Judaism and the environment are often simply those published by Jewish writers in Jewish journals.

Such an article at least provides a minimalist Jewish filter: it has gone through the hands of a Jewish editor who has assessed its interest to a Jewish audience. Sometime references are included where writers relate to a subject of analysis in a specific Jewish context (for instance, when the writer occupies a prominent position in the Jewish community, or refers to a personal Jewish experience).

At this stage of scholarly research, determining an overall Jewish attitude in contemporary Jewish writings toward such a multifaceted issue seems an almost impossible mission. The interactions and meeting-points of Judaism and modern environmentalism, often still in a nascent state, are dispersed over a vast, incoherent, largely uncharted area. However, important references are also found in sources which do not directly relate to the subject of the environment.

Availability of books specifically referring to the Jewish outlook on modern environmentalism would have facilitated analysis at a much higher level, but such resources hardly exist. As said, the modest number of publications available deal with a large number of issues, but often an individual article focuses on one or a few points only. These publications help only in a limited way to map out an overview of the Jewish approach to environmentalism.

This study then assesses the Jewish attitude toward environmental issues as it emerges in the large corpus of Jewish literature that has developed over more than three millennia. As a complete analysis goes way beyond its scope, I have focused on parts rather than on the whole in an attempt to obtain a strategic view. This will offer insight into a large number of key issues in the Judaism-environment field, and help develop an initial overall framework for it.

**Earlier Jewish debates**

Not only has modern environmentalism grouped many existing environment-related concerns within a specific area of interest, it has also added other emerging issues. It has created additional perspectives, as well as given fresh impetus to discussions. Several issues which have been around for many decades or centuries, including man's relationship to animals and nature and pollution problems, are hardly seen today outside the broader context of the environmental debate.

As a result, some of the ongoing discussions within Judaism, and between Judaism and the outside world, that took place before modern environmentalism emerged have been drawn into the new, broader framework. Vegetarianism is one such example.
Another example is the debate on Jewish ritual slaughter. Even here, however, the nature of the debate has changed in recent decades. On the one hand, the large influx of Moslems into Western Europe has created a second target for the opponents of ritual slaughter. On the other, the emergence of the animal rights movement has augmented and radicalized the debate on the status of animals in society.

The meeting of Judaism and modern environmentalism on so many subjects may ultimately lead to another development. Looking at the latter from the diverse angle of a relatively consolidated system like classical Judaism may provide new impetus to some environmental fields.

Different approaches

In assessing Jewish and environmentalist positions, we are dealing with two radically different approaches: Judaism – particularly its Orthodox component – expresses the approach of an ancient and relatively cohesive and consolidated system, however heterogeneous, while – as stated earlier – modern environmentalism’s approach is in flux and often confused. Although both operate, to different degrees, on theoretical and pragmatic planes, the nature and priorities of these planes also differ.

In Judaism, the theoretical component has a major legal and theological – as well as ethical – orientation. In modern environmentalism, that same component has a strong ideological, philosophical and ethical content. However, it could be argued that a pseudo-theology may also be present in modern environmentalism, as opposed to a revealed religion.

Some elements of the two approaches are incompatible on the theological/philosophical plane. For example, according to several Jewish writers, deep ecology and Judaism are antithetical with regard to the desired man/nature relationship.

On the other hand, in terms of practice, the two often overlap. One could claim that Jewish Orthodox practice is far more compatible with environmentalism than other currents in modern society, because Halakha has many elements which restrain the abuse of nature, even if the reasoning behind the law differs from environmentalist reasoning. It is due to halakhic restrictions that Jewish civil society and its individual members are not free to do with nature as they wish.

No continuing debate

Recent contemporary Jewish writings on environmental issues reveal many aspects which illuminate the range of contemporary Jewish
attitudes toward modern environmentalism. Few writers state their motives for interest in the environmental cause, but we may still clearly see how heterogeneous Jewish thinking is today. Attitudes range from ‘catastrophist’, with proponents telling us that Jews must be involved in ‘healing the planet’, to those of ‘contrarians’, who tell us that the state of the environment has actually improved over the last few years, and that environmentalism is of no specific Jewish concern.\(^{30}\)

Another pertinent observation in this field is how little reference Israeli scholars make to publications in the U.S., and vice versa. At a 1998 conference on “Judaism and the Natural World”, held at Harvard University,\(^{51}\) it also became clear how far the American Jewish reality is from the Israeli one.

Third, the debate further illuminates the nature of contemporary society, one aspect of which is its increasing specialization and fragmentation. Fifty years ago, an environmental argument would most probably have been presented in a mainstream journal. A Jewish thinker would have responded to any criticism with regard to Judaism in the same publication.

Nowadays, theses are often outlined in specialized environmental publications, and countered – sometimes much later – in a specialized Jewish journal. There is no continuing debate, only a statement of positions and counter-positions presented in different arena. However, to the limited extent that there is a discussion between Jews on the subject, it takes place in Jewish publications.

Judaism as an organized religion

Broadly speaking, Jewish positions on environmentalism can be categorized as: a) those based on the organic development of traditional Jewish sources (not all writers in this category are necessarily Orthodox), and b) all others, embodying very diverse attitudes.

Orthodox Judaism is centered around ancient religious law, with time-honored institutions qualified to exercise its interpretation. Over the centuries, however, the decisive authority of rabbis has become fragmented.

In our time, the State of Israel has increasingly become the center of Jewish thought and action. Orthodox Jewry’s position as the country’s dominant religious current makes it – \textit{de facto} – the main religious force in Judaism, irrespective of its numbers.

In addition to Orthodoxy in its various shades, various other forms of Judaism – such as Conservative, Reform and Reconstructionist – have developed over the last two centuries. This has remained largely a Diaspora phenomenon while in Israel these groups remain of
limited importance. Another modern development is that some Jews claim that their personal vision of Judaism is as valid as the institutionalized forms.

_Judeo-Christian_: an unacceptable term

It is often assumed that Judaism and Christianity hold a common position with regard to the environment. The term ‘Judeo-Christian’ that appears many times in environmental literature is controversial. While this expression may be acceptable to Christians, who see Christianity as having grown out of (yet away from) Judaism, it is not acceptable to many Jews, who see their religion as distinct. The latter would argue that the differences between the two religions far outweigh the similarities, even if Jewish concepts such as monotheism, charity and martyrdom have permeated Western society. Furthermore, the specific attacks on Christianity and its attitude toward the environment concern many arguments which have no relevance in Judaism. Thus Jewish writers often have very different attitudes from Christian ones.

This distinction is perhaps best illustrated in the ‘spoliation of nature’ debate, which has focused on the interpretation of Genesis 1:28, where God says to man: “Be fertile and multiply, 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.” Critics of the ‘Judeo-Christian’ attitude referred to a literal interpretation of the text and of actual Christian behavior in later centuries. In Jewish tradition, however, interpretation of the text as expressed in the Oral Law and the later rabbinical decisions is integral to an understanding of the Bible verse. Attempting to deduce the complex and elaborate Jewish attitudes toward environmental issues from any single Bible text testifies only to its practitioners’ ignorance of Judaism. This issue will be dealt with in more detail in Chapter Two.

_Judaism and environmentalism: A detached view_

Overall, modern Judaism and certainly Orthodox Judaism have taken a rather detached view of environmentalism. For a people always out of sync with the contemporary mainstream, the ideological challenge of modern environmentalism may be considered exceptionally mild and hardly relevant. In today’s Jewish world modern sects are seen as more of a threat. For example, the integration of Judaism and Christianity which the Jews for Jesus attempt has put them outside Jewish society. The same is true for the integration of Judaism and Islam by the Donmeh, the surviving adherents of the false 17th century messiah, Shabbetai Zevi.
In order to understand how small the tension is between Judaism and environmentalism, it should be noted that those who attempt to integrate the two systems meet little resistance. What is more, this tension – as far as it is felt at all – refers only to the ideological approaches of Judaism and environmentalism. There is usually no contradiction with regard to practical environmentalism. Like anyone else, Jewish communities in both the Diaspora and Israel would benefit economically by assessing, for example, how to reduce energy consumption in their communal buildings. Some detailed suggestions for this are to be found in Jewish environmental advocacy publications. 

The Jewish agenda

There are several other reasons why organized Jewry has a rather offhand approach to environmentalism. One is the large number of primary worries which the Jewish people has. For thousands of years the Jewish people – small in number – has been confronted with powerful and hostile forces and such diverse challenges as paganism, Hellenism, Christianity, Islam, Enlightenment, Communism and Nazism. Moreover, murder, expulsion, enforced or incentive-prompted conversion, and assimilation have long threatened the survival of Judaism.

Political agendas are established according to priorities – whether formal or informal. The Israeli political scientist Peter Medding defined the Jewish agenda in the last decades as follows: “Jewry’s first political interest is for the survival of the Jewish group, not only of those Jews in the same society, but of Jews everywhere. Among other ways this manifests itself in the sheer ‘instinct for survival’ of Jews as an independent people, and in intense concern with all aspects of physical security, the certainty of which is never, as with other interest groups, taken for granted... Jewish concern with sheer physical survival and security as a basic and primordial interest has, in recent years, been strikingly manifested in actions in support of Israel, particularly those seeking to ensure its continued physical existence.”

Medding’s observations illuminate our subject. The literature available indicates that environmental issues are generally not high on the political agenda of the Jewish people. Possible threats which global environmental problems may cause humanity at large in a relatively far-off future seem for the Jewish people no more than background noise against much more immediate and direct menaces.

The physical threats of the Arab nations against Israel are continuous. One of the most recent ones, at the beginning of 1998, led
to new gas masks hurriedly being distributed to the entire Israeli population, in view of the possibility of Iraqi rocket attacks with bacteriological warheads.

Arab terrorists and their associates have also managed to impact on the way Jewish communities live abroad, including the specific security measures they have to take – Buenos Aires being an extreme case in point. To this should be added the cultural-religious threat to the Jewish people of assimilation.\(^\text{42}\)

Another reason for the modest Jewish interest in our subject may be that the small number of Jews prevents them, as a group, from having a significant impact on global warming, biodiversity, the damaging of the stratospheric ozone layer, acid rain, etc.

Thus, with few exceptions, Jews see no reason to get involved as an organized group.\(^\text{43}\) Their involvement mainly occurs on the individual level.\(^\text{44}\)

**Multiple interaction**

The interaction between Judaism and environmentalism falls into many categories. Some of these are discussed in more detail in the following chapters. These and several others are briefly reviewed hereunder.

Of the many matters which come under the heading of Judaism’s attitudes toward environmentalism, this study deals mainly with the religious aspects rather than sociological, cultural or political ones. Neither does it analyze extensively the environmental attitudes of the State of Israel, now the dominant political expression of the Jewish people.\(^\text{45}\) Some reference will be made in this chapter to issues such as post-Biblical history, Zionism, the kibbutz movement, Israeli and Diaspora attitudes, and organized Jewish environmentalists. However, these will mainly be left for further study.

**Classical Jewish sources**

Any attempt to deduce a more consolidated ‘Jewish’ position toward the natural world, the environment at large, or modern environmentalism, requires a review of the classical sources. It is in this area that this study’s main effort lies.

The behavior of observant Jews toward the environment is largely regulated by the body of Jewish law called Halakha. Chapter Three details those Halakhot which prescribe the attitude of both individuals and communities toward the environment.

Additional classical Jewish attitudes toward the environment are analyzed in Chapter Four. This deals mainly with the non-legal parts of the Bible and particularly, its narrative.
An important classical source for expanding the comprehension of Jewish attitudes toward the environment is the *Aggadah*, which uses a specific method of Biblical interpretation called *Midrash*. These texts show that, many centuries ago, Jews asked themselves basic questions which have re-emerged in a secular form in modern environmentalism. This is demonstrated by a series of environmental *Midrashim*, reviewed in Chapter Five.

**Liturgy**

Classical Jewish attitudes toward the environment are expressed in the liturgy. Neil Gillman points out the importance of liturgical texts for the current subject, and states his belief that they played a greater role than Talmudic *Aggadah* in “shaping the belief system of post-Biblical Jews”.46

Among these texts is a series of blessings frequently said by Jews before or after eating, praising God for bringing food forth from nature. For instance, before eating bread, God is thanked for “bringing forth bread from the earth”. Before eating an apple or a pear, thanks are offered to the “Creator of the fruit of the trees”.

Less frequently used blessings pertain to the aroma of fragrant woods or barks, plants, fruits, spices and oils. Other benedictions refer to the witnessing of natural phenomena – perceived as tokens of God’s benevolent presence – such as lightning, falling stars, lofty mountains, a rainbow, great deserts, the sea, beautiful trees or animals, as well as trees blossoming for the first time in the year.37 One message which the liturgy conveys is that nature is not in itself Divine, but an instrument of God.

Hertz observed: “These benedictions are especially remarkable. Those who were for ages excluded from the life of Nature, thanked God for everything inspiring, beneficent and beautiful in Nature... in connection with these Benedictions, the word *bless* connotes not thanks giving only, but also wonder and admiration.” 48

Blessings of relevance to our subject also appear in the daily liturgy. In the morning prayer the observant Jews praise God for various elements of His creation. One of these refers to God’s spreading the earth above waters, another to His giving the cock [who crows unfailingly every morning] the understanding to distinguish between day and night.

Another blessing is said in the morning service, where God is praised as Former of light and Creator of darkness, Maker of peace and Creator of all things. In the evening service, in the first blessing preceding the *Shema* prayer, God is praised as Creator of day and night.49 The *Amidab*, the other central part of the morning and evening services, refers
to God as the cause of the wind's blowing and the rain's falling in winter, and in summer, as the cause of the dew.

In the contemporary liturgy there is a prayer for the planting of trees in Israel. This prayer, composed by a former Sephardi Chief Rabbi, Benzion Meir Uziel, is said on the occasion of Jewish National Fund tree-planting ceremonies.

A more systematic analysis of Jewish liturgy will provide insights on several aspects of the Jewish attitude toward environmental issues. This is discussed in Chapter Four with respect to relevant Biblical texts in prayers.

**Mystical literature**

The subject of references to environmental matters in Jewish mystical literature is of considerable importance. Detailed discussion on this subject will probably require the efforts of many scholars. In order to give some indication of its many angles, I shall refer here to a few dispersed issues which touch upon environmental matters.

In the Midrash literature it is told that the cutting down of a fruit-bearing tree creates a worldwide silence, as does the divorce of a couple. This is a way of attaching a universal meaning to these acts, the first of which has an environmental character.

Alexandre Safran, the Chief Rabbi of Geneva, writes that, according to the teachers of Kabbalah, "when a man in his own mind treats any object as if it were a dead thing, he damages that object. In fact, the things we wrongly call 'animate beings' and 'inanimate things' are part of the same cosmic reality, the whole of which is 'animated' by the divine breath that flows through it. True, this breath is manifested more clearly in man than in animals, more in the animal than in the vegetable kingdom, and more in the vegetable than in the realm of minerals, but all these realms constitute a coherent unity, where the various elements are closely linked."

Safran adds that the Kabbalists consider damage caused to nature similar to that done to man and his property: "The way man behaves toward nature is judged with the same severity as his behaviour towards his fellowman... In polluting nature, man defaces 'the work of God'; in striking his fellowman, he 'disparages' the image of God." According to Safran, the Kabbalist is emotionally affected by the cutting of a tree, as if it were a man.

Haifa Chief Rabbi Shear Yashuv Cohen tells the story which he heard from Rabbi Aryeh Levin, who went for a contemplative walk with Chief Rabbi Kook in the fields of Yaffa. Rabbi Levin picked a flower. This shocked Rabbi Kook, who said to him: "My whole life I have been careful not to pick grass or a flower, which could have
grown up as there is no grass which does not have a star above which tells him: grow up. Each grass says something, each stone whispers a secret, each being sings a song." 58

One finds a similar attitude in the Habad (Lubavich) trend of Hasidism. The late leader of Habad Hasidism, Rabbi Menahem Mendel Schneersohn, said: "The world is not governed by chance or caprice. Every motion within it, from the turning of a leaf in the wind to the transition of power from nation to nation, is controlled by a unique Divine Will." 59 On another occasion, he recalls "how his father, the Rebbe Rashab, having once observed that he had unthinkingly plucked a leaf, commented: ‘How can a person be so lightminded in relation to a creature of the Almighty? This leaf is something created by the Almighty for a particular reason... One should always remember the mission and the Divine intention of every created thing.’ " 60

Transmigration

The 16th century Kabbalists in Zefat were against the killing or torture of any living creature, including insects, as they believed that human souls could transmigrate into animals. 61

However, J. David Bleich considers that opposition to meat-eating was the view of a small minority even within the kabbalistic tradition: "A number of kabbalistic sources indicate that, quite to the contrary, the doctrine of transmigration yields a positive view regarding the eating of meat.

According to these sources, transmigrated souls present in the flesh of animals may secure their release only when the meat of the animal has been consumed by man. The mitzvot performed in preparation and partaking of the meat and the blessings pronounced upon its consumption serve to ‘perfect’ the transmigrated soul so that it may be released to enjoy eternal reward." 62

The halakhic scholar and mystic Ben Ish Chai states that it is forbidden to dump carcasses in the city. 63 The person who sees one should pay from his own pocket to dispose of it outside the city. He bases his statement on Rabbi Yitschak Luria, the great 16th century Kabbalist who lived in Zefat and warned that people should not smell the odor of a carcass, partly because it is damaging to the soul. Other environmentally relevant references can be found in the Zohar 64 (see Chapters 4 & 5).

Minhagim

Another area to explore concerns environmental aspects of the minhagim (religious customs). This is an extremely fragmented field
in view of the differences between local communities. The few examples given here will indicate some directions which these minhagim take.

One example of these is the *tashlikh* prayer said on the afternoon of the first day of *Rosh Hashana*, the Jewish New Year, next to a river or well where, as it were, one’s sins are thrown in.\(^6^5\)

It was common in many Ashkenazi communities in Eastern Europe to feed the birds on the Shabbat when the *beshallakh* section from the Torah was read in the synagogue.\(^6^6\)

Many minhagim relate to *Tu bi-Shevat*, the New Year of the trees. Originally, it was a minor religious holiday on which special prayers were said. It changed in character in the 16th century with the immigration of Spanish and Portuguese Kabbalists to the Land of Israel. The group around Rabbi Yitshak Luria in Zefat turned it into a day of eating fruit. In Saloniki, the Jews gave special performances in Ladino. The youngsters who participated in them were disguised as trees, and each tree sang its song, accompanied by a choir. In modern Israel, largely secular tree-planting ceremonies have been added to this.\(^6^7\)

Minhagim are not necessarily animal-friendly. On the day before *Yom Kippur*, in order to be absolved of the sins of the past year, it is common in many Jewish communities to slaughter a rooster for every male, and a chicken for every female. Before this, one rotates the animal three times above one’s head, reciting prayers. This custom is called *kapparot*. One of the major medieval scholars who opposes this custom is Rashba,\(^6^8\) who claims that this seems to him an “Amorite custom”, i.e. a pagan one. He succeeded in banishing this custom from the town where he was rabbi.\(^6^9\)

Another custom was practiced only by the Jews in Yemen, from the month of *Elul* to *Yom Kippur*: at night the Jewish children would organize in groups to hit stray dogs. After chasing the dogs, the children returned to the synagogue. Even though the children were warned by their parents that this made the animals suffer, which the Torah forbids, the custom continued.\(^7^0\)

**Philosophy**

Medieval and modern Jewish philosophers have given attention on various occasions to the relationship between Judaism and the natural world. Here too, only a few examples can be given which could be indicative of directions for further study. However, they cannot be taken as representative of the body of Jewish literature in this field.

Some medieval Jewish philosophers thought about the role of the world in God’s creation and the way to reach God through nature.
Maimonides begins by saying that there is a commandment to love and to fear God, and asks the way to achieve this. He answers: “When man reviews His deeds and His marvelous major creations he sees His infinite wisdom he immediately loves, praises and glorifies and expresses a great desire to know God... and when he ponders these things... he will be afraid and recognizes that he is a small dark and lowly creature.”

Another medieval philosopher, Bahya ben Joseph ibn Paquda refers to man’s reflection on nature. In his *Hovot ha-Levavot*, written around 1080, he claims that this reflection brings man to recognize God’s existence and His being the world’s creator. Bahya states that we see the world “as a built house, where everything needed is available. Heaven above is a ceiling. The land is stretched as a platform and the stars are ordered like lights. All bodies are gathered like treasures... and man as the owner of the house uses all what is in it.”

God and nature the same?

An important philosophical matter referring to the relationship of Judaism to nature is treated in a responsum. Rabbi David Nieto, of the Sha’arei Shamayim congregation in London, posited in a sermon that God and nature were the same. He called those who do not believe this heretics. However, some of his congregants considered this position an heretical deviation. Nieto had to explain his position by saying that he referred to those people who considered wind or rain as nature; these are works of God, and that is valid as well for the whole of nature.

This matter was referred to a leading scholar of the day, Haham Zevi. He discusses the question with two colleagues from Altona and his responsum also reflects their position. He says that the same idea is mentioned in Yehuda Halevi’s *Kuzari* (where God is called ‘Tevd’ – nature – because He places His stamp on all creatures). Haham Zevi also quotes another great scholar, Rabbi Yeshayahu Horowitz, in his work *Shelah*.

He adds that Nieto referred to God’s responsibility for the overall functioning of nature, and that those who criticize Nieto are in fact criticizing the true scholars of Judaism. He strengthens Nieto’s stand by saying that one should be grateful for his having given the sermon, because he has enlightened them that everything is guided by God. In doing so, he has told them not to follow the opinions of the philosophers. Haham Zevi does not specify which philosophers he is referring to.

Among modern Jewish thinkers, Rabbi Kook’s views on nature are often quoted in Jewish writings on the environment.
to Rakover, Kook's views on man's attitude toward nature may be examined from various angles. For instance, the adaptation of mankind's life to nature's ways is a worthwhile challenge for both the individual and humanity in general; however, this should not be at the expense of higher-placed ideals, such as learning the Torah. Man's moral level and his relation toward nature should correspond.

Rakover quotes Kook's letter to his son, who had decided to no longer eat meat: "My main intention is that you check very well whether this will not cause any weakness in the development of your physical and mental courage and that you will not become a captive of the animal protectionists, most of whom, as it seems to me, have in the depth of their soul a hatred against man." Man's relationship toward the environment should be one of belonging, from the recognition that God has created both man and nature.

Benjamin Ish-Shalom summarily interprets Kook's concepts: "When speaking of nature, one must not to attribute to it a set and defined essence in and of itself. Rather one must relate to a broader essence – that of holiness... According to this view, nature, in all its dimensions, including the spiritual and the material, the cosmic and the cultural-historical, is a process of the revelation of God in the world, and man is perceived to be its pinnacle, the highest expression of this positive and optimistic divine-cosmic natural process."

Contemporary environmental theology and ethics

Some thought has been given in contemporary Jewish writings—particularly in the United States—to the possibility of developing a Jewish environmental theology and ethics. A substantial part of the 1998 conference on “Judaism and the Natural World”, mentioned earlier, was devoted to this issue.

Moshe Sokol has pointed out that “overall, applied Jewish normative ethics is characterized by a strong legal rather than virtue orientation. Discussions of concrete problems in business, biomedical or legal ethics are typically (although of course not always) found in Judaism's vast legal corpus, which is centrally concerned with moral issues.” He concluded from this: “Theologians would do well to examine what the applied Jewish normative tradition – its body of case law – has to say about environmental issues, and using that as data, attempt to construct a theology which explains or grounds these normative materials.”

A coherent review of classical sources and other components of the Jewish environmental field is necessary for starting to develop an environmental theology and ethics more relevant to the Jewish
people. The expansion of Jewish environmental Halakha is central in providing a basis for this. Without it, efforts to develop a Jewish environmental theology and ethics will remain personal exercises.

**Post-Biblical development**

Another issue which falls within the broad subject of Jewish attitudes toward the environment will not be treated here in any detail, but deserves some discussion: the behavior of Jews toward the environment in post-Biblical times. So, for instance, the first-century historian Flavius Josephus relates that Herod collected many wild beasts and lions together which were trained to fight with each other, or with men who had been condemned to death. Foreigners who saw this were delighted, but Jews saw it as a major breach of their tradition. 

As one modern writer put it: “Instances of Jews engaging in hunting, like Herod in the Roman era, and Provencal Jews in medieval Europe, are few and are, undoubtedly, instances of acculturation to the non-Jewish environment.” Even Jews remote from religion occasionally observe this. The nuclear physicist, Abraham Pais, writes: “Hunting was something that never interested me in the least. As Einstein told me on a later occasion, Walther Rathenau, at one time Germany’s foreign minister and a Jew, had once told him that when a Jew says he likes to hunt he is a confessed liar.” A rather different view of this is taken by Theodor Herzl, founder of the Zionist Movement, as will be discussed later in this chapter.

Israel's former chief rabbi, Rabbi Ovadia Yosef - considered by many the main contemporary Sephardi halakhic authority - forbids Jews to attend bullfights.

Animals were seen favorably if they fulfilled a function. For instance, while the image of dogs in the literature of the Second Temple Mishnah and Talmud periods was largely negative, as Joshua Schwartz has analyzed, they could fulfill positive functions, such as being guard dogs, if trained and treated properly.

Contrary to many other Near-Eastern nations, the Jews usually buried their dead in a simple manner, and didn't put utensils in the graves, which could be considered a waste of resources. Even princes could not be buried in silk clothes. Maimonides writes that this was considered a sign of arrogance, following non-Jewish customs, as well as an act of destructive waste. He also mentions that it is important to stress equality in death.

The various references in the Talmud to pollution control laws indicate that they conditioned Jewish behavior. Beyond that, historical cases mentioned there give us further insights. So the Talmud
records: “The market places of Jerusalem were swept clean on a daily basis.” Even if the main motivation was related to avoiding spreading cultic impurity, its effect was environmental.

A reference in the Mishnah to recycling tells us that wicks were made from the worn out trousers and belts of the priests.

**Personal hygiene**

Personal hygiene is a partial indication of attitudes towards pollution. The traditional emphasis on personal hygiene, as prescribed by Jewish law, cost Jews dearly in the time of the Black Death. In many areas, there was a long tradition among Christians of accusing the Jews of various types of poisoning. As proportionately fewer of them died from the Bubonic plague, they were accused of having caused its spread, and were massacred.

The reality contrasted heavily with the perception which associated Jews with extreme pollution. The standard of hygiene was not always maintainable, however. In later years in Germany, the hygienic conditions of Jews deteriorated so much that some illnesses appeared particularly frequently. In 1777, Elkan Isaak Wolf wrote a publication on the illnesses of the Jews, dedicated to his brothers in Germany. He refers to these illnesses, which he attributed to life in the ghetto, and to the political and social repression of the Jews.

Externally imposed conditions on Jewish life are also reflected in the attitudes toward the environment. Space was a scarcer resource in Italy’s ghettos than it was in many small villages in Eastern Europe. So Rabbi Shimshon Morpurgo, a 17th century Italian rabbinical authority, wrote in a responsum that Jews are not allowed to establish damaging industries, and those which already exist in the city must be removed. However, he added, in a reality where the Jews are confined to special Jewish quarters, the community cannot survive economically if it carries out such a removal.

In a 19th century responsum, the Netsiv from Wolozhyn answers a question from the rabbi of the city of Zvinikradka. The latter writes that the Jews in the city, where he recently became a rabbi, do not drink water from the local river because they found a few small organisms in it, which may make the water unfit according to the dietary laws. However, the owner of the only two good wells, which are far away, charges exorbitant prices for the water; they cannot afford this and so go thirsty. The rabbi adds that he himself has tested the river water and did not find any polluting organisms.

The Netsiv’s careful reply reflects both religious considerations with respect to the dietary law and awareness of pollution problems. He says that the water should be tested during various seasons
because the organisms develop only at certain temperatures. He adds that the river water should be tested at a place where it leaves the town, because perhaps the pollutants flow into it from the city itself. If none of these tests show any organisms, then the river water may be drunk.\(^{102}\)

While in literature one often finds that Jews, as city-dwellers, were cut off from nature, one often hears in personal stories how close people were to nature in the Hasidic areas of Eastern Europe. There are also tales of Hasidic rabbis showing concern for animals.\(^{103,104}\)

This analysis of attitudes toward the environment can be extended to our own times. Whoever visits Har Nof, one of Jerusalem's new ultra-Orthodox quarters, is struck by its stone desert character, particularly as this is a middle class neighborhood whose inhabitants include many Western immigrants. The contrast with the verdant kibbutzim is striking.

It is difficult to assess how much truth there is in the speculations one sometimes hears that this distancing from nature is a reaction to the Zionists' interest in it. If, as we will see below, trees and agriculture have become Zionist icons, should ultra-Orthodox non-Zionists consider them alien?

**Israel/Zionism environmental interactions**

An assessment of the environmental attitudes expressed by the State of Israel and its citizens requires a detailed socio-historical examination of the country's Zionist roots. A thorough analysis of this area, however, is beyond the scope of the present study.\(^{105}\)

In this connection, it is imperative to assess the relationship between the immigrant pioneers and the land. Their negation of the Diaspora and the disproportionate number of Jews living in cities led to the glorification of living on the land, tilling the soil and draining the swamps.\(^{106}\) This must be seen within the larger and more complex framework of Jewish perception of types of dwelling-places. Chapter Two will refer to this from other perspectives.

However, for Theodor Herzl the transition from city to rural setting was not obvious at all. He claimed — and was proven wrong by later Zionist pioneers — that those who wanted to turn Jews into farmers were mistaken. He considered the farmer an anachronism: "If one conserves the farmer artificially, that is because of the political interests he has to serve. To make new farmers according to ancient prescriptions is an impossible and stupid undertaking."\(^{107}\)

His attitude toward nature was remote from that of modern environmentalists. He wrote: "If we were in the situation where we wanted to liberate a country from wild animals, we would not do it
the way the Europeans did it in the 5th century. We would not go out with a spear and lance against bears, but rather organize a great pleasurable hunt, drive the animals together and throw a bomb under them.”

For all that, tree-planting is a major symbol in Zionism. It is part of Zionism’s practical-political approach to making the land more livable, and became an important ritual marking the return of the Jewish people to Palestine. The Jewish National Fund, the World Zionist Organization’s key instrument for Jewish land purchases in Palestine, was the main promoter of this activity. Funds for the reforestation campaign were collected throughout the Diaspora, and this continues until today.

When Aubrey Rose reviewed U.K. Jewish involvement in environmental issues for the British Board of Deputies, he concluded: “The longest-running Jewish effort for the environment is tree planting, coordinated by the Jewish National Fund, which has helped with the 170 million trees planted in Israel over the last 40 years. In this way British Jews have been deeply involved in environmental issues... particularly the fight against soil erosion, turning back the desert and developing water resources.”

The goal of tree-planting was also instilled in the minds of children, who participated in the effort. Historian Simon Schama describes it almost poetically: “When not paddling in the currents of time, I was gumming small green leaves to a paper tree pinned to the wall of my heder, the Hebrew school. Every sixpence collected for the blue and white box of the Jewish National Fund merited another leaf. When the tree was throttled with foliage the whole box was sent off, and a sapling, we were promised, would be dug in the Galilean soil, the name of our class stapled to one of its green twigs. All over north London, paper trees burst into leaf to the sound of jingling sixpences, and the forest of Zion thickened in happy response.”

In 1949, Israel’s first prime minister, David Ben-Gurion, “asked Yosef Weitz, the head of the Jewish National Fund, ‘to plant a billion trees in the coming decade’ arguing that the value of afforestation was incalculable, as it was the ‘essence of everything’, that ‘the tree would lead us to our goals’, and that planting was the only way in which Jews could develop such strong ties to their land that they would never again be thrown out of it.”

The forest planted by the Jewish National Fund thus became a Zionist icon. Later, in the State of Israel, trees would fulfill another symbolic function. At the Yad Vashem Holocaust Memorial Institute, trees are planted in memory of the Righteous of the Nations, those
Gentiles who saved Jews at risk to their own lives during the Second World War.

**Zionism and the environment**

Avner de-Shalit argues that the relationship between Zionism and the environment has passed through three stages. The first, during the early waves of immigration “was characterized by a romantic attitude to nature and a glorification of rural life.” 115 This was combined with an almost religious attitude toward physical labor. Hertzel Fishman writes: “The individual who epitomized this ‘religion of labor’ (dat ba’avoda) doctrine was Aaron David Gordon (1856–1922), who came to Eretz Israel from Russia when he was 48 years old.” 116

Among the early Zionists, Gordon can indeed be considered closest to early environmentalists. For him, nature and (manual) labor were inseparable values. He exalted nature, writing: “Nature, spread wide open for everybody, is for man exactly what water is for the fish and air for any living being.” 117 Gordon also praised primitive man above civilized man, as the former is close to the fountain of life.118

The kibbutz epitomized the place which tried to imbue these new values, even in very young children. These included “sharing... i.e. to have no feeling of ‘mine’ and ‘thine’; ... the love of nature; love of the nation, and the importance of work.” 119 In some kibbutzim kindergarten teachers attempted to transmit these values from age two.120

Yael Zerubavel mentions a popular children's story, glorifying rural life, which tells how Yosef Trumpeldor brought a small group of settlers to check the damage done by an Arab attack on Hamra, a Jewish settlement near Tel Hai. In the story, the plow, symbol of the Jews and the Zionists' new relationship with nature, is contrasted with the gun, symbol of the Arabs.121,122

Those in agricultural settlements who did not share the pioneers' romantic attitude were considered outsiders. We may see this from Shabtai Teveth's biography of Moshe Dayan who, as soon as he “satisfied his curiosity in a new area of work... lost interest and grew impatient with its endless repetition.” 123

De-Shalit traces the beginning of the second stage of the relationship between Zionism and the environment back to 1930, even though “it only became prevalent after 1948, following the foundation of the State of Israel and the subsequent massive immigration... As immigration and settlement came to bear a social and national character a new ethos emerged: the ethos of development.” 124,125

The Israeli author Meir Shalev relates that, when he was an elementary school pupil in the 1950s, he was confronted there with “the
political concept of nature. I think that Israel was the only country which taught its children ‘mosquito studies’ in history rather than in zoology classes. From the point of view of the Israeli educational system, the Anopheles mosquito, which transferred the malaria bacteria and infected the pioneers through them, was not an insect but a terrorist. Together with the field mice, the hamsin, the Mufti of Jerusalem, the couch-grass, the communist party and some larvae, he wanted to destroy the Zionist enterprise but failed, to our good fortune.”

Shalev also refers to the reclamation of the Huleh swamp: “There a Dutch engineer was also brought in, an expert in land reclamation and drainage. He warned that the peat ground, for which those who reclaimed it had so many hopes, could behave in unexpected and even damaging ways. Then the JNF hydrologist stood up, hit the table with his fist and declared: our peat is Zionist peat, our peat will not do damage. As is known, the Dutch have much experience in the reclamation of land, but even they had not yet met land with a political conscience.”

The ethos of development is well expressed in a popular song of the time, Morning Song, whose lyrics were written by one of Israel’s best-known poets, Nathan Alterman: “In the mountains the sun is already hot and in the valley still shines the dew. We love you fatherland, with joy, song and hard work. From the slopes of the Lebanon till the Dead Sea, we will worship you with plows. We will plant you and build you. We will make you very beautiful... we will cover you with a coat of concrete and cement.”

In another song, Southern Lullaby, lyricist Yehiel Mohar tells of a father who plows the land at night as “our land has no free time”. In yet another song, written by Zalman Hen, the text reads: “see how great this day is, a fire burns in the breast, and the plow again opens forest in the field. Hand, pick-ax, hoe and hay-fork came together in a storm and will again light up the land in a green flame.”

De-Shalit argues that until the late 1980s this development ethos “outweighed any attempt to put forward environmental values and considerations.” Thereafter it ceded its place gradually to “the modern, rational environmental attitude of the 1990s.” Nonetheless, pollution of Israel’s coastal aquifer has continued, causing damage that may prove irreversible.

Well before the ‘90s, however, the value of nature had changed. It is far from being a working tool in a popular song by one of Israel’s best-known songwriters Naomi Shemer: “The law says: you are not allowed to pick flowers here... frightened hinds look at the sign, where it is written explicit: hunting is forbidden... man be careful,
do not touch the irises... the mountain tulip is out of bounds... each hill which rises on the outskirts of the town is fenced-off wild land.” In the song Shemer aspires to be protected like nature: “I sometimes think that it might perhaps be worthwhile if I were a narcissus or cyclamen, or even a common squill... if I were an animal or a flower, my situation would be different.”  

There are many more – often fascinating – environmental aspects of Zionism, but they are beyond the scope of this study.

Besides its Zionist roots, any assessment of Israel’s attitudes toward the environment should also analyze the cultures the immigrants brought with them from their many countries of origin; these account in part for the heterogeneous attitude found in Israel on the subject. Furthermore, the extent to which the political realities of Israel’s situation as a beleaguered nation have made its people focus on priorities other than the environment needs to be considered.

The religious kibbutz movement

The attitude of the religious kibbutz movement toward nature is an interesting case, in view of its attempted synthesis of religion and Zionism. In this movement, the relationship of man and nature started to emerge as a major ideological and practical issue a few decades before modern environmentalism became a mainstream interest in the West. Out of Orthodox and socialist conviction, the religious pioneering movement established the first religious kibbutzim in Israel in the 1930s, and devoted great attention and many discussions to this subject.

From Aryei Fishman’s description of the mood of these religious pioneers, one realizes how far their spirit was from modern environmentalist thinking. Fishman mentions the “charismatic religious experiences of the Orthodox pioneers” which were created by an immediate relationship with God.

“Manual labor, especially in the cultivation of the land, also symbolized participation in divine reality. For working the land not only allowed the individual to see himself ‘as a partner of God in Creation’ but also aroused a religious feeling of ‘soul cleansing and body purification’, and thereby moral rejuvenation of the individual personality. And cultivating the soil of Eretz Israel was of particular significance in creating the feeling of oneness with the religious ordering force.”

Thus the charismatic religious experience of the first plowing at Kibbutz Tirat Tzvi was described as follows: “With a quiver of holiness, the tractor opened the new land.” In short, by using the symbols embedded in the metaphysical past of Genesis, religious pioneers felt that they were participating in the perfection of the cosmic order.
As the above excerpts illustrate, even when Orthodox Jewry in modern times is concerned with the environment, it is for very different reasons and with other objectives than those of environmentalists. When reviewing the literature on Judaism and environmentalism, even where their concepts are parallel, it becomes clear that they draw from different viewpoints and cultures.

Fishman remembers the dualistic attitude of the members of the religious kibbutz where he lived, shortly before the establishment of the State of Israel. During the week, kibbutz members tried to reap the maximum from the land. On Shabbat, however, the land became part of nature and they felt an inner need to walk through natural surroundings, admiring it.137

Israeli achievements

While Israel undoubtedly has much to learn from various Western countries in the field of environmental policies, nonetheless it has made major contributions in the field of combating desertification. The Jewish National Fund tree-planting program is another source of pride for Diaspora Jewry.138

The fore-mentioned British Board of Deputies report, compiled by Rose, investigated whether there was a specific Jewish contribution to make in the cause of the environment. In his report, he reviewed both the British and the Israeli situations.

Besides tree-planting, he pointed to Israel's research on alternative energy sources, particularly in the solar energy field. Other Israeli achievements of worldwide significance that he mentioned are water desalination and desert agriculture.139

An interviewer asked the Chief Rabbi of Great Britain, Jonathan Sacks, how modern-day Judaism relates to the global environmental problem. He stressed the importance of the State of Israel: “At the very time when we're talking about the destruction of rain forests, we are part of a people who reforest a completely desolate area. That's been the tremendous work of the JNF throughout the last hundred years and Israel is one of the world's leaders in reforestation... And I think that's no accident. I think Jews cared so much... every year they [celebrate the festival of] Tu bi-Shevat—they have new trees planted and so on. Really this global contribution is the contribution that Israel has been making.” 140

Diaspora attitudes

Another subject with sociological and political aspects concerns Jewish Diaspora attitudes toward the environment. Among the major Diaspora communities, mainly in the United States but also in Britain,
attitudes toward the environment are becoming an increasingly important issue.

Some American Jewish leaders hold that Jewish communities as such should actively pursue environmentalist policies. "In our synagogues, we must take a hard look at the way we conduct business, and insure that our activities are in keeping with sound environmental policies," writes Mordechai Liebling, the Executive Director of the Federation of Reconstructionist Congregations and Havurot.\textsuperscript{141}

Arthur Waskow claims, "There are two major reasons for the American Jewish community to take as one of its major concerns – in prayer and celebration, in daily practice and in policy advocacy – the protection of the earth-environment. One is for the sake of the earth. The other is for the sake of Jewish continuity, renewal and vitality. Both are for the sake of God and Torah."\textsuperscript{142}

Waskow goes so far as to claim that, by the end of this century, the organized U.S. Jewish community may no longer have any great reasons for continued existence in the present framework.\textsuperscript{143} Therefore, in order to revitalize Jewish life and strengthen the interest of the young in the Jewish community, he suggests that Jewish energy today should be focused on solving major global environmental problems that especially threaten the future of the young.\textsuperscript{144}

An early attempt at giving prayer services an environmental character is described by Reconstructionist\textsuperscript{145} Rabbi Everett Gendler. He emphasizes outdoor services, which underline the elements of nature in the liturgy.\textsuperscript{146, 147}

A conference on "The Environment and Jewish Life" took place in Washington D.C. in March 1992, before the Earth Summit. It was meant to give a 'Jewish communal response to the world environmental crisis.' Those who initiated it included many leading personalities from major U.S. organizations as well as three Jewish senators.

It became clear that environmental problems may receive lip service but they do not generate much active support in the American Jewish community. Waskow claims: "Even that conference did not put specific programs or visions before the Jewish community."\textsuperscript{148} Of the various Jewish denominations in the United States, it is the smallest one, the Reconstructionists, which seems most interested in environmental issues. Jewish organizations with a specific environmental goal are islands in a large, not very concerned community.

Among the Jewish activist groups in the United States is the Philadelphia-based Shomrei Adamah\textsuperscript{149} (Hebrew for Keepers of the Earth), which has been active for more than ten years now. The American Jewish community has since understood that it must address environmental issues on its agenda more systematically.\textsuperscript{150} This led to the
foundation in 1993 of COEJL, the Coalition on the Environment and Jewish Life. It has about 30 participating organizations, representing a wide spread of the organized American Jewish community. However, COEJL's budget is very modest compared to that of major Jewish organizations.

COEJL has published a reader, *To Till and To Tend*, which contains *inter alia* material about Jewish attitudes toward environmental issues, suggestions for environmental action, and information on American Jewish organizations – and some Israeli ones – active in promoting environmental awareness.¹⁵¹ This has been mailed with other material to a large number of American Jewish congregations of all denominations.

COEJL collaborates with several Christian groups: the United States Catholic Conference, the Evangelical Environmental Network, and the National Council of Churches of Christ, in the National Religious Partnership for the Environment, which started its activities in 1993. The latter aims for the integration of commitment to global sustainability and environmental justice in all aspects of religious life. Its goals include defining and instructing an ethic of stewardship, encouraging sustainable habits of consumption, and encouraging laws linking environmental protection and social justice.

In Britain, too, environmental problems have raised official Jewish community interest. Representatives of British Jewry were one of the seven religious groups which addressed the All-Party Committee of Lords and Commons on Conservation in 1988.

The 1988 annual conference of the United Kingdom Reform Synagogues,¹⁵² which represent about 15% of British Jewry, “passed a resolution based on the bal tashhit (you must not destroy) principle of Judaism, urging reverence for the earth and all its creatures. It also made practical recommendations. This was followed by two publications of its Social Issues Group, setting out specific ideas for education and practical action.”¹⁵³

**Individual contributions to modern environmentalism**

Many Jewish individuals are active in the environmental debate. As long as they do not specifically refer to their Jewishness and do not write about Jewish aspects of environmentalism, for the purposes of this study they are not considered exponents of Jewish positions. Rather they are seen as being involved in the general environmental debate. Consequently, this leaves out the noteworthy contributions of several Jews to the environmental discourse.

Norman Solomon, editor of *Christian-Jewish Relations*, suggests that “the contribution made by individual Jews, for instance scientists
and economists, to the modern ecological movement... would make
an interesting study in itself.” 154 However, as science historian Yakov
Rabkin points out, since World War II, looking for specifically Jewish
contributions to certain disciplines is often taboo, and research on
Jewish contribution to the sciences encounters hostility. 155

In his 1989 report to the Executive of the Board of Deputies of
British Jews reviewing whether there was a Jewish contribution to
the cause of the environment, Aubrey Rose mentions prominent
Jewish lecturers and journalists committed to the general environ­
mental cause. He adds: “Jewish individuals and groups are much
involved with national bodies like Friends of the Earth, one of whose
main backers is a prominent Jewish businessman.” 156

It is well known that in progressive politics, avant-garde ideologies
and innovative areas of scholarship one often finds a disproportionate
number of individuals of Jewish origin. 157 But does that mean that
their involvement reflects a specifically Jewish point of view or vision?
Perhaps it is a reflection of the socioeconomic situation or the state
of mind of Jews? It may also be heavily influenced by their minority
position and frequent persecution. The correlation is not necessarily
clear, and this question requires another forum for debate.

Perception of the environment in works of literature

Another area, not further included in this study, which may yield
interesting insights is the analysis of how modern Israeli and Jewish
writers perceive environmental issues in fiction, poems and other
writings. 158

Once one knows from their diary or memoirs that the subject is
of interest to an author, as in the case of the Yiddish novelist Israel
J. Singer, one can search in their literary works for references. 159 Such
‘environmental motives’ also appear in the novels of his brother,
Nobel prize winner Isaac Bashevis Singer. 160 This was pointed out
by Edward Alexander for the novel The Estate. He refers to one
of its characters, Zadok, ‘the wayward son of the hasid Jochanan’.
Alexander stresses that “Singer’s vegetarianism, which he called his
only dogma, however embarrassing it may be to some of his admirers,
is crucial to his understanding of the Holocaust.” 161

The leading modern Hebrew poet Chayim Nachman Bialik refers
in several poems to the filth in the Jewish village in Russia. 162

In his reflections, Albert Cohen considers that it is one of the great
merits of his Jewish forefathers to have stood up against nature: “One
very beautiful day, which was the glory of the universe, one of my
ancestors, a being of Nature and a member of the animal species,
decided crazily, decided ridiculously, on his two hairy and still twisted
legs, on a schism: that he didn’t want to belong any more to nature and obey its laws.” He also recounts his mother’s perception of God’s caring for animals.

Franz Kafka’s attitude toward the natural world would require a more specialized study. This becomes clear upon reading the opening sentence of one of his best-known short stories, *Metamorphosis*: “When Gregor Samsa awoke one morning from his unquiet dreams, he found himself metamorphized in his bed into a monstrous vermin.”

Bernard Malamud’s *God’s Grace* is a fable based on a second Flood, the result of a nuclear war between America and Russia. Only one human survives, with the ambiguous name of Calvin Cohn. God tells him: “And that you, Mr Cohn, happen to exist when no one else does, though embarrassing to Me, has nothing to do with your once having studied for the rabbinate, or for that matter, having given it up.” Cohn’s initial survival is due to the fact that he was carrying out research at the bottom of the sea when the rockets fell. He then negotiates with God not to correct the error, and wonders whether he is the new Adam, and if the latter’s job is at all open. *God’s Grace* may, to some extent, be considered a Jewish environmental novel.

Several modern Israeli writers refer to the ‘Zionist aspects of nature’ from a variety of perspectives. In one poem, Rahel writes: “I have never sung to you, my land, or glorified your name, with heroic deeds or battles’ booty. Only a tree have my hands planted on the silent banks of the Jordan river.”

In modern Israeli fiction there are also many references of relevance to our subject, of which only a few examples can be given. The contemporary writer A.B. Yehoshua tells the story of the watchman of a JNF forest planted on the ruins of an Arab village destroyed in Israel’s war of Independence. Both the watchman and an old Arab worker dream about burning the forest, an act finally carried out by the Arab.

In his *Russian Novel*, Meir Shalev introduces a teacher who conveys the Zionist message in various ways: “Every radish which became red in the green garden, every baby and calf which was born was a promise and expressed hope.” And elsewhere: “we do not believe in the underground rolling of the dead and the forgiving of sins. Our forgiving of sins is working the land and not the digging of graves. Our rolling of dead is ploughing.” In his later days, however the teacher suffers a stroke and becomes a Zionist heretic.

**Toward an integrated understanding**

It is only by systematic and integrated study in the above fields that a full picture of Jewish attitudes toward the environment can be
developed. This requires seeing Jewish environmental studies as a single scholarly field. In that way a more profound understanding of the various areas of interaction between Judaism and environmentalism can be obtained. Thus the present study can only make a preliminary contribution to this discourse.

Notes for Chapter One

2 Ibid., p. 3.
3 Henry David Thoreau (1817–1862), an important American thinker and social critic.
4 Bramwell, op. cit., p. xi.
5 Eugene C. Hargrove claims that American environmental attitudes have developed out of an intricate interplay between Western science and art over the last three centuries. He argues that “modern American environmentalist attitudes are the product of several centuries of changing attitudes towards nature and are most closely associated with nineteenth century developments in the natural history sciences of botany, biology and geology, and in the arts, particularly poetry and American landscape painting... modern ecologists and environmentalists have a perception of the world which is little different from and is directly traceable to the *aesthetic* perception of early botanist, biologists, and geologists and are, therefore, in this sense, compatible with at least one important component of science and with Western civilization and man.” Eugene C. Hargrove, The Historical Foundations of American Environmental Attitudes. Environmental Ethics, Vol. 1 No. 3, Fall, 1979, pp. 209–240.
7 There were earlier environmental conventions as well. The precursors of the 1983 international convention to prevent pollution in the seas (MARPOL) go back to 1926. The international agreement to regulate whaling was agreed upon in 1946. For a review of the more important international environmental conventions, and the effectiveness of global environmental management, see Lucas Reijnders, De effectiviteit van mondial milieubeheer. In: Milieu als mensenwerk. Groningen: Wolters-Noordhoff, 1996, pp 242–256. Dutch.
12 There is considerable disagreement as to who is to blame for today's environmental problems. Reijnders points out that both ideological and material factors are cited. “Ideological factors which are often mentioned are the Jewish-Christian tradition, focused on subduing nature, the belief in progress, the arrogance of man, the disappearance of animism, the alienation of one's own products, unlimited egoism, etc. Overpopulation, capitalism, industrialization, 'bad technology', and economic growth are considered material factors. All these explanations have in common that they are characteristic of
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13 Alm says: “The first wave I would characterize as concern over air and water pollution. This wave is characterized by concern over pollutants that one can see, smell and which make eyes tear. In 1980, a second major wave occurred, focusing on hazardous wastes. The concerns shifted from visible obvious pollutants to toxic wastes such as dioxin, harmful in parts per trillion. The American public was deadly afraid of these invisible forms of pollution, most of which were chemical substances. The third wave of environmental concern in the United States regards the global environment. Global climate change and ozone depletion being the two most obvious issues.” Alvin Alm, Environmental Quality and Soil Remediation: the American Experience. Lecture at Conference on Waste Treatment, Recovery and Soil Remediation: the American Experience, April 1990, Marina di Ravenna.

14 This lack of relationship between philosophical, theological and ethical discussions on the one hand, and the practical world of society’s environmental policies on the other, is also seen with regard to Judaism. At the Conference on Judaism and the Natural World, which took place February 22–24, 1998, as part of a series of conferences on religions of the world and ecology at the Center for the Study of World Religions at Harvard University, the discussions between philosophers and theologians on Jewish environmental ethics did not provide any additional relevant insight into practical work in the field of environmental corporate strategy which I have now been carrying out for well over ten years.


18 Laqueur defines the Greens as “a catch-all movement for various single issue groups, a coalition of sectarians and, generally speaking, those in firm opposition to the existing political and social order without necessarily having clear ideas on how to bring about change.” Ibid., p. 205.

19 Ferry concludes: “At the intellectual, or even philosophical plane only deep ecology can pretend to have a global political vision – but for that it has to dress in the tawdry finery of the neoconservative or new leftist romanticism. If environmentalism wishes to escape these ridiculous and dangerous archaisms, if it accepts to define itself reformist, it has to recognize that it is a pressure group that expresses a sensitivity, which in order to be able to be shared by the great majority, has not itself a vocation for power. If it will be political, environmentalism will not be democratic; if it will be democratic, it has to renounce the mirages of the ‘grande politique’.” Luc Ferry, Le nouvel ordre écologique. Paris: Grasset, 1992, p. 215. French.


21 In the concluding paragraph of her book, Bramwell writes: “What after all today’s ecological movement is advocating is a return to primitivism, and the abandonment of treasure and knowledge to tribes, and nations in foreign lands who pose no threat to us. Consciously or otherwise, this is a death-wish. We are not talking here about eschewing food additives and colouring matter, whole food in a whole land, as were
the earlier ecologists, but something different – and deathly. For today’s ecologists, their hope of regeneration presupposes a return to primitivism, and thus, whether they wish to enunciate it or not, concomitant anarchy, the burning before the replanting, the cutting down of the dead tree. The father of the movement is an utter rejection of all that is, and for at least three millennia all that was.” Bramwell, op. cit., p. 248.

22 Paehlke is one of those who refers to environmentalism as a set of values. He lists a number of central values asserted by proponents of environmentalism, which “have consistently been emphasized in the writing of environmentalists and are implicit in their actions.” Among those are: the appreciation of all forms of life, humility of the human species with respect to the global eco-system, a pre-occupation with the quality of human life and health, a global perspective, a lengthy time horizon, and disapproval of waste. Paehlke, op. cit., pp. 143-145.

23 “Environmentalism… is a scientifically-based philosophy, not in the sense that it is unrelated to metaphysical principles, but rather in the sense that a philosophy of the environment derives from new data which is being put forward by scientific research (ecology, environmental studies). Moreover, philosophically, this theory is based on anti-speciesism and respect for all organisms, for life, or for ecosystems, and so forth, and is thus rooted in the tradition of the Enlightenment.” Avner de-Shalit, From the Political to the Objective: The Dialectics of Zionism and the Environment. Environmental Politics, Vol. 4 No. 1, Spring, 1995, p. 81.

24 This reflects its recent advent and the general fragmentation which increasingly characterizes contemporary society.

25 I argue that interaction with a range of organizations with different viewpoints may gradually create greater coherence in the environmental field, further enhancing its system. Others claim that more divergence among environmental currents is probable in the future.

26 In conversations over the past decade with more extreme environmentalists, I have occasionally heard observations such as ‘capitalism should be abandoned’, ‘the economy should shrink’, ‘world government should be established to save the environment’, or ‘consumption patterns should change radically to obtain a sustainable society’. While these ideological positions are not usually accompanied by a detailed program on how this could be achieved, it is clear that the implementation of these ideas could only be realized by significant curtailment of individual freedom.


28 Whereas environmental issues have been given considerable publicity, and the number of publications on them is large by any standard, the number of references to modern environmental issues from a Jewish viewpoint is extremely limited. To put this in perspective, one single article in the general environmentalist context – Lynn White’s The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis, published in 1967 – has generated more than two hundred reactions. This is probably more than the number of serious articles on environmentalism written by Jewish writers in a Jewish context in the same period. See also Chapter Two.

29 James M. Jasper & Dorothy Nelkin write, “Anthropomorphic projects break down the boundaries that humans perceive between themselves and other animals. Animals rightists believe that animals share traits such as the ability to plan a life, to have intentions and to carry them out, or to be loyal and loving. They say that, ‘A life is a life is a life…. It’s alive and that’s all that matters,’ and that, ‘A rat is a pig is a dog is a boy.’ Taking this belief to its extreme, one activist could even claim that ‘it is obvious that the life of a healthy chimpanzee must be granted a greater value than the life of a human who is a hopelessly retarded infant orphan.’ How are such beliefs possible?” James M. Jasper


32 David Ehrenfeld & Philip J. Bentley write: “Christian thought and Christian interpretation of Jewish and Christian Scripture is so pervasive in Western Society that even most of the Jews who think about these matters do not realize that the problem of the chasm between humanity and the rest of nature exists more for Christians than for Jews. Christianity has a stronger emphasis on the other world than on this world, and classical thought has a much stronger hold on Christianity than on Judaism.” Judaism and Stewardship, *Judaism*, Vol. 34 No. 3, Summer, 1995, p. 303. The authors refer to Trude Weiss Rosmarin, Judaism and Christianity: The Differences. New York: Jonathan David, 1943.

33 A quotation from the radical German ecologist, Jutta Ditfurth, illustrates how remote the Christian reality is from Judaism: “Before Christian morality and missionaries flooded the world and preached that contraception and birth control were a punishable act in the framework of God's laws, the problem of too high birthrates in Africa, Asia and Latin America didn't exist.” Jutta Ditfurth, *Lebe Wild und Gefährlich: Radikaloekologische Perspektiven*. Cologne: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 1991, p. 142. German. While Orthodox Judaism opposes contraception, it does not carry out any missionary activities among non-Jews.

34 For an example of how environmentalist attitudes have led to changes in the approach of some Christian theologians, see Chapter Two.

35 Many Jewish environmentalists do not perceive any significant tension between Jewish values and those of the ideological currents in modern environmentalism. Eilon Schwartz points out that ‘Judaism’s relationship with the natural world is far more ambivalent than that with which many Jewishly-committed environmentalists would feel comfortable. Too few have delved into the complex and intricate relationship between Judaism and the natural world, a relationship which, while containing the ‘green’ traditions often quoted, also contains the admonition in *Pirkei Avot* that ‘One, who while walking along the way, reviewing his studies, breaks off from his study and says, “How beautiful is that tree! How beautiful is that plowed field!” Scripture regards him as if he has forfeited his soul.’ (Ethics of the Fathers, 3:7).” Eilon Schwartz, Judaism and Nature: Theological and Moral Issues to Consider While Renegotiating a Jewish Relationship to the Natural World. *Judaism*, Fall, 1995: 44(4).

36 ‘Jews-For-Jesus’ is clearly a post-Holocaust phenomenon in that an old impetus of Jewish flight-into-Christianity is combined with a new reluctance to abandon the post-Holocaust Jewish remnant. However, the ‘movement’ combines the uncombiable: unless its members propose in perpetuity to marry only other Jews-for-Jesus, their distant offspring may conceivably be for Jesus, but they will not be Jews.” Emil L. Fackenheim, To Mend the World: Foundations of Future Jewish Thought. New York: Schocken Books, 1982, p. 283.

37 In each generation, tensions between different systems are felt in different ways. Jewish communists under communist regimes could not ignore the tension between the two systems, even when they tried to minimize their Jewish ethnicity. Few Orthodox Jews anywhere adhered to communism. Tension may also be noticed by an outside observer. The philosopher Feyerabend maintains that even modern democratic society is so dogmatic that it does not allow other cultures to flourish within it. He writes, “Democratic principles, as they are practiced today, are incompatible with the undisturbed existence,
development, and the undisturbed growth of specific cultures. A rational-liberal (-Marxist) society cannot contain a black culture in the full sense of the word. It cannot contain a Jewish culture in the full sense of the word... It can tolerate such cultures only as secondary outgrowths of a basic structure, which itself is an unholy alliance of science, rationalism (and capitalism).” Paul Feyerabend, Erkenntnis fuer freie Menschen. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1980, p. 129. German.

38 See, for example: COEJL, To Till and To Tend: A Guide to Jewish Environmental Study and Action. New York: COEJL, no year of publication.

39 Julian Simon states this explicitly: “Instead of environmental ‘causes’, it is better that our money go (just one example) for loans to Soviet emigrants in Israel and the U.S. - emigre dentists so they can buy the equipment they need, to talented kids for violin lessons and to Russian computer programmers who want to open shops.” Simon, op. cit., p. 51.


41 One indication of this is a survey conducted in the United States in 1997 by the Center for Jewish Community Studies of the Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs. Jewish state legislators and Jewish community state government affairs professionals were asked which issues that they had dealt with in the last biennium they considered of major legislative relevance. Environmental issues hardly figured in their responses. Daniel J. Elazar, Strengthening the Ties Between the American Jewish Community and the States. Jerusalem Letter (Special Report), No. 364, August 15, 1997.

42 Perhaps Medding’s argument is applicable in reverse to the interest shown today in the general environmental situation. As Europeans and Americans in the 1970s and 1980s no longer felt threatened by war and had few other major concerns, they had the time and mind available to fear environmental risks. There are some indications that, with unemployment rising, the environment is now receiving less attention.

43 Miriam Wyman, a member of the board of directors of Shomrei Adamah, writes: “It is easy to say that, as Jews and as individuals, we are not responsible for environmental problems or for solving them. In the public perception, government, business and industry are the chief culprits. That, however, is only partly true. North Americans are the world’s largest users of energy and new material resources... Middle-income citizens – which most North American Jews are - use twice as much energy in daily life as low-income citizens. We also use ten times the resources used by those in the developing world. How can we think that we are not responsible?” Miriam Wyman, Derekh Eretz: A Personal Exploration. Conservative Judaism, Fall, 1991, pp. 5–13.

44 For some background on Jewish environmental activism, see Aubrey Rose, Judaism and Ecology. London: Cassell, 1992, chapters 14–16.


47 See also Mishnah Berakhot 9:1 and the discussion in Bavli Berakhot 59 a/b.

Shema is the central prayer of both the morning and evening services.

Rabbi Benzion Meir Uziel, 1880–1953.

‘You, who have constructed Zion and Jerusalem, bless this country, given by You to our ancestors. Lord, accept the sacrifice of this earth which is Yours; give it Divine grace, and Your benevolence. Give it salutary rains in their season, to quench the thirst of the mountains and of Israel’s valleys, to water each plant and tree, and the shrubs which we here plant for You today...’ Moche Edelman & Joel Lion, Le chant des arbres: une anthologie pour Tou-Bichset. Jerusalem: Keren Kayemet leIsrael, 1993, p. 4. French.

Pirke d’Rabbi Eliezer Section 33.


Ibid., p. 72.

Ibid., p. 73. Safran adds that the Kabbalah sees significant similarity between trees and man: “This is more than a mere resemblance, for there is an actual affinity between the crown of the vegetable world, the tree, and the crown of the animal world, man. This affinity between the friendly representatives of these two worlds is expressed in their appearance and their vocation. Both are ‘upright’, both are ‘bearers of fruit’, and both offer protection to those who need it.” Ibid., p. 74.

Rabbi Aryeh Levin, 1885–1969, particularly known for his work as a prison chaplain.

1865–1935, Palestine’s first Chief Rabbi.


Ibid., p. 250a.

Sperber points out that the Maharil (born in Mainz in 1365, died in Worms in 1427) recommended that Jews not feed the fish in the rivers. He assumes that the reason for this was to prevent accusations by Christians, common at that time, that the Jews were poisoning rivers and wells. Daniel Sperber, Israel’s Customs: Sources and History. Jerusalem: Mossad HaRav Kook, 1994, Part III, Footnote 23, p. 121. Hebrew.


Rabbi Shlomo Ben Aderet, born in Barcelona in 1235, died in 1310.

Rashba Responsa 1:395.


Moses Maimonides (1135–1204), the most important Jewish codifier and philosopher in the Middle Ages, was born in Cordova and died in Fostat (ancient Cairo).

73 Born around 1040; lived in Spain, and died in 1100.
75 David Nieto was born 1654 in Venice and died in 1728.
77 Haham Zevi (Rabbi Zevi Ashkenazi) was born in Moravia in 1660 and died in Lemberg in 1718.
78 *Teshuvot* Haham Zevi 18.
79 Ibid.
80 Hermann Cohen and Abraham Joshua Heschel are two more 20th century Jewish thinkers from the period before modern environmentalism became a mainstream interest, who have referred to Judaism and the natural world.
82 Avraham Yitzhak Hacohen Kook: *Igrot baRa'aya* 3:802, as quoted in Rakover, ibid., p. 36.
85 Sokol added: “What picture of God, humanity or the world best accounts for the normative data? How might this picture lead to fresh new thinking, and help chart new directions to the challenges posed by evolving threats to the well-being of the planet? The strength of this approach is that its theological reflections are grounded in concrete Jewish normative data, and thereby connect theology to how the Jewish tradition—at least in its legal manifestation—practically responds to the natural world.” Ibid., pp. 24–25.
89 Responsa *Yechave Da’at*, Part 3, section 66. For more details on his responsa see Chapter Three.
92 Ibid 4:1.
93 Bavli *Pesachim* 7a.
94 *Sukka* 5:3.
95 An example of such attention to hygiene is given in the testament of Eliezer of Mayence, who died in 1357: “Wash me clean, comb my hair, trim my nails, as I was wont to do in my life-time, so that I may go clean to my eternal rest, as I went clean to Synagogue every Sabbath day.” In: Israel Abrahams, ed., *Hebrew Ethical Wills*. Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1948, Part II, p. 217.


98 The difference in mortality and morbidity between Jews and non-Jews continues to puzzle researchers until today. So, for example, Allen Glicksman writes about the Jewish elderly in the United States: “Jews appear to live longer than non-Jews. Even in the urban slums of the early part of the century, the mortality rates of Jewish immigrants were significantly lower than those of Irish and Italian immigrants as well as those of the native white population. Even in more recent periods, the death rates of Jews have been found to be lower than those of non-Jews in the same socioeconomic class. Jewish longevity may be due to occupations of lower risk and higher social status, more stable family lives, more frequent use of formal health-care services, lower rates of alcohol use, and an ability to mobilize resources in later life... The concerns Jews have about health are legendary. Concern about children is often expressed as concern about their health, and every little symptom seems to assume enormous importance. Even controlling for socioeconomic status, Jews visit doctors much more often than non-Jews and report more symptoms. Rather than directly expressing his feelings about some matter, the individual may display the ‘pain and suffering’ it causes.” Allen Glicksman, The New Jewish Elderly: A Literature Review. New York: The American Jewish Committee/The William Petschek National Jewish Family Center, 1991, p. 11.

99 Rabbi Shimshon Ben Yehoshua Moshe Morpurgo, born in 1681 in Austria, died in Ancona in 1740.


101 Rabbi Naftali Tsvi Yehudah Berlin, born in Mir, Poland in 1817; died in Warsaw in 1893.


103 “It is told of the Hasidic master, R. Zusya of Anapole, that, saddened by the sight of caged birds, he would purchase them from their owner in order to set them free. He informed his disciples that he regarded this to be a form of ‘ransoming prisoners’ which constitutes a moral imperative.” Quoted in Bleich, op. cit., p. 195.

104 Buber relates an anecdote of how the Hasidic Rabbi David of Lelow accuses a coachman before a Zaddik – a righteous man; in the Hasidic movement, a spiritual and moral leader – of hitting his horses. Seeing that the load was heavy, the rabbi had suggested to the other traveling Hasidim that they walk; but the coachman was dissatisfied with this and had started to hit the horses. The coachman said that he had the whip from the rabbi himself, who had told him that it was only for making the sound of whipping, but not for actually hitting. The coachman said the rabbi had delayed his travel so much that he became angry; and added: “Whom should I hit then, if not the horses?” Martin Buber, Gog und Magog. Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 1957, pp. 14–19. German.

105 Amnon Hadary, former editor of The Forum, a quarterly journal of the World Zionist Organization, writes: “In contemporary Israel, one can hardly address environmental issues without assessing the input of Zionist ideology, and Zionism is very much the child of both its fin-de-siècle derivation and its biblical ancestry. In this, modern Israel resembles the Bible-imbued frontier period in America, which helps to explain the strong affinity in the pioneer tradition of the two cultures.”
“Tree planting had begun in the prairie states as early as the 1860s. Indeed, the protection of trees and forests was an early environmental issue in America. While championing the conservation of Yosemite in 1890, John Muir, a pioneer American preservationist, spoke in religious terms remarking that while God’s glory was written all over his works, in the wilderness the letters were capitalized. In Israel both the Jewish National Fund and the Nature Reserves Authority continue to say Amen to his notion.” Amnon Hadary, Paradise Greened. *Midstream*, April 1994, p. 21.

106 One serious ecological mistake resulting from this ideology, after the establishment of the State of Israel, was the draining of the Huleh Valley in the 1950s: “This undertaking was called a project, and it represented the climax of the Zionist effort to overcome the alien environment. It was justified by three main arguments: that it defeated malaria; that it ‘liberated the soil,’ thus enabling more people to settle in the area; and that it enabled the soil beneath the swamp to be exploited for agricultural purposes. The irony is that none of these aims was fulfilled, except for that of populating the area; the soil turned out to be agriculturally worthless, and malaria was eradicated before the draining started... On the other hand, an ecological disaster took place when dozens of species of fish, animals, and birds that used to live in the Hula were forced to migrate or perish.” De-Shalit, op. cit., p. 79. An attempt to reverse this process began a few years ago by reflooding part of the area.


108 Ibid., p. 66.

109 “On the eve of the creation of the State of Israel, the JNF owned over 235,000 acres, almost half of all land owned by Jews in Palestine, including large tracts in the Galilee, Samaria, Huleh, the Negev, and the Valley of Jezreel. The Fund has also been the chief instrument in the reforestation of the land, and the purchase of tree stamps is a familiar charitable device among Jews all over the world.” Melvin I. Urofsky, American Zionism From Herzl to the Holocaust. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995, p. 312.

110 Palestinian terrorists have occasionally understood this symbolism and have set fire to Israeli forests. A totally different example of this symbolism was the strong psychological impact on the nation when, in 1996, fire destroyed a sizable forest area near the village of Shores, outside of Jerusalem. This impact was also felt further afield: the event even made the news on major radio and television stations in Europe, which usually only report fires in other countries if they cover much larger areas.

111 The Board of Deputies is the representative organization of British Jewry.


113 In Schama’s romantic reminiscence: “The trees were our proxy immigrants, the forests our implantation.” He continues: “And while we assumed that a pine wood was more beautiful than a hill denuded by grazing flocks of goats and sheep, we were never exactly sure what all the trees were for. What we did know was that a rooted forest was the opposite landscape to a place of drifting sand, of exposed rock and red dirt blown by the winds. The diaspora was sand. So what should Israel be, if not a forest, fixed and tall? No one bothered to tell us which trees we had sponsored. But we thought cedar, Solomonic cedar: the fragrance of the timbered temple.

“Every year the tempo of leaf-gumming accelerated furiously toward Tu bi-Shevat, the New Year for Trees. The festival had originated in an arbitrarily established date that separated one year’s tithed fruit from the next – an oddly pleasing way to celebrate the end of a tax year. In Israel, though, it had been wholly reinvented as a Zionist Arbor Day, complete with the trowel-wielding children planting the botanical equivalent of...
themselves in cheerful, obedient rows. It was an innocent ritual. But behind it lay a
long, rich, and pagan tradition that imagined forests as the primal birthplace of nations;
the beginning of habitation. Paradoxically... this was a tradition that had prospered
in the very cultures that had stigmatized the Jews as an alien growth and had periodically
undertaken campaigns of murderous uprooting. But we knew even less about K.G.
Frazer's *Golden Bough*, with its mythic connections between sacrifice and renewal,
than we did of Conradian fatalism. Nor did it occur to us that the biblical Hebrews,
like all the pastoral tribes of the ancient Near East, were certain to have contributed
to the denuding of the Levantine hillsides. And even had we known, it wouldn't have
mattered. All we knew was that to create a Jewish forest was to go back to the beginning
of our place in the world, the nursery of the nation. Simon Schama, *Landscape and

Reference to these childhood experiences can be found in many other reminiscences
by Diaspora Jews. Several years ago, philosopher Jerome Segal published a controver­
sial book defining a strategy for the creation of a Palestinian state. He mentioned that
he grew up in a totally Jewish neighborhood in the Bronx. Referring to his attitude to
Israel in that time, he begins: "There was a time every year when we went door-to-
door in the neighborhood selling stamps and collecting money that would be used to
plant trees in Israel. It never occurred to anyone to ask why we were doing this, or
what our relationship to Israel was. Israel wasn't a central preoccupation; it was part
of the landscape. Raising money for Israel was just an accepted part of childhood."
Jerome M. Segal, *Creating the Palestinian State*. Chicago: Lawrence Hill Books, 1989,
p. 2.

114 De-Shalit, op. cit.
115 Ibid.
116 "A.D. Gordon's Zionist philosophy focused on the exalted value of agricultural labor. Industrialization has alienated human beings from one another and from a close
relationship with the cosmos; it is impersonal, machine oriented, and outside the
purview of nature. It relates to man as a number, not as a person. Hands, not humans,
work the machines, and in due time even hands will be replaced by mechanical
gadgets. Man must restore his relationship with nature and soil in order to see the
fruits of his labor and to reunite with the supreme source of creativity – God – in
whose image he was created. By working the soil, man realized his inherent creative
potential within the context of an intimate at-oneness with the universe; once again
he will become God's partner in creation." Hertzel Fishman, *The Challenge to Jewish

117 A. D. Gordon, *Auswahl aus seinen Schriften*. Berlin: Juedischer Verlag,
1937, p. 142. German.
118 "Aren't the senses getting worse all the time and less perfect, as the borders of know­
ledge and feelings enlarge and their treasures become richer? Do we find among those
who have been illuminated by the light of science... many people with good eyes
who can see well and far? Do you find among these, people who look out from their
offices and from their research over nature? The same goes for the other senses. In
particular, the wild man – the man of nature – has healthy, sharp senses and reaches
in the meantime with his simple senses what the man of science, with all his tools
and equipment, cannot achieve. The reason for this is not only in the negative, i.e.
that natural man is not in the unfavorable circumstances of life in which civilized man
is, who has removed himself from nature. The reason is also positive: natural man is
always close to the fountain of life and draws from it, without interruption, as much
as he needs." Ibid., p. 145.
“The love of nature that the nurses attempt to transmit at these ages includes not only a feeling for nature in general, but a love for the physical and geographic environment in which the children have their existence – [the kibbutz], and its surrounding flora and fauna. A positive attitude towards this environment is not induced through formal instruction or admonition, but through experience in walking through the kibbutz, hiking into the fields and orchards, and observing the various barnyard animals. By teaching the children the names of the flora and fauna, telling them something of their habits, stimulating their interest in their behavior, and making them feel their beauty, the nurses hope to stimulate their love of nature in those manifestations that can be observed and appreciated by young children... The inculcation of a love of nature at times involves the use of negative sanctions, although such sanctions are mild. One day, for example, some three-year-olds picked grass from an area in which the gardener was trying to grow new grass. The nurse, upon seeing this, came out immediately and told the children to stop this, explaining seriously to them that they should not do this because it was nice to have grass, and that if they picked the young grass now, it would not grow.” Ibid., pp. 143-144.

“The settlers found the place burned down and the fields deserted. As they approached the field, they saw a plow that had been left behind... All of us surrounded the plow and stared at it. The plow was our symbol: they [the Arabs] have weapons and we have a plow. They left our plow here. They did not take it. ‘We will take the plow to Tel Hai’ exclaimed Trumpeldor after a prolonged silence. ‘We will go on plowing and sowing the land.’ As they were about to leave for Tel Hai, the Arabs resumed the attack. Under the enemy's bullets, Trumpeldor carried the plow all the way back to Tel Hai. When they arrived there safely, one of his comrades asked him, ‘Did you risk your life for one plow, Yosef?’... ‘This is not merely a plow,’ Yosef solemnly replied, ‘this is our flag, the flag of the awakening people of Israel. And one cannot abandon a flag at the hands of the enemy.’ ” Yael Zerubavel, Recovered Roots: Collective Memory and the Making of Israeli National Tradition. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995, p. 154.

This is one of the many nature-related contrasts between Jews and Arabs which is stressed by Zionism. Several people have told me that, as children in the years before the Six-Day War, they were taken to hills overlooking the West Bank where their teachers pointed out how green the Israeli side was and how barren the Arab one.

“For the majority of Nahalalites, young and old, it was a profound and memorable experience to watch their animals eat their own barley for the first time. They even held a special celebration to mark the event. First they harvested the barley, then brought it in ceremoniously and placed it in neat stacks on the threshing floor, The idea was that the mules would be tied to stakes and the entire village would then watch with pride as the animals munched on the first sheaves of barley grown in Nahalal. Each child was given the honor of leading the mules to his ‘family stake’, and all the children did so, except Moshe. His parents were deeply shamed: ‘Every other child knew where his stack was, but Moshe could not find our stack of barley and tie the mule to the stake.’” Shabtai Teveth, Moshe Dayan: The Soldier, the Man, the Legend. London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1972, pp. 55-56.

De-Shalit claims that a pragmatic attitude to nature was part of this ethos. This entailed the view that "nature could be exploited to rebuild a normal social structure for the Jewish people and thus sustain a personal psychological change in the young immigrant. Strangely enough, the two attitudes could coexist simultaneously in the same
persons. They thought as romantic ruralists when they were on the kibbutz, and at one and the same time as developers when they met in the trade unions or national institutions.” De-Shalit, op. cit.

125 It is striking that when the theoretical physicist Pais writes about Israel’s first president, Chaim Weizmann, himself a well-known scientist, trying to convince him to join the Weizmann Institute in Israel, he doesn’t refer to the scientific content of their discussion. One of the few things Pais mentions is that Weizmann “pointed out the green fields and plants one could see from his window, adding with evident pride that, when he first came to Rehovoth, all you saw was barren sand.” Pais, op. cit., p. 275.


127 Ibid., p. 34. Shalev continues: “The Dutch engineer returned home. The Huleh was reclaimed and then it became clear that the Zionist peat disappointed all hopes. It was even, to a certain extent, anti-Zionist.”


129 1000 Zemer Ve’od Zemer. Tel Aviv: Kinneret, 1981, Part 1, p. 44. Hebrew.


131 De-Shalit, op. cit.

132 1000 Zemer Ve’od Zemer, Part 2, op. cit., p. 29.

133 Although no statistics exist on this point, immigrants from the United States, Canada and some other Anglo-Saxon countries play a role in this field disproportionate to their numbers.

134 When the original peace agreements with the Palestinians were signed, Uri Marinov, the first Director-General of the Israeli Ministry of the Environment, stated that the impact of peace would improve the ecological situation in the Middle East even beyond Israel’s collaboration with neighboring countries. He added: “From a macro-economic point of view, the reduction in defense costs may facilitate greater investment in environmental issues, if the population presses for it.” Interview with Uri Marinov. In: Manfred Gerstenfeld, Israel’s New Future: Interviews. Jerusalem: Rubin Mass & the Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs, 1994, p. 184.


136 Ibid., p. 83.

137 Personal communication.

138 Hadary underlines the positive influence of the tree-planting program on Israel’s microclimates. “While it would be extravagant to claim that the weather profile of Israel’s arid zones has already been changed, the hundreds of thousands of trees that have been planted in thousands of trenches to ward off erosion have had a salutary effect. First of course is the observable impact on the landscape. In the past, as one drove along kilometers of road from Be’er Sheva southward, the eye became fatigued, attention stultified by the unrelieved dun colored earth. Now one sees stands of trees clumped together inside earth enclosures. There is no doubt that these microcatchment basins have had far-reaching consequences for the microclimate of the South.” Hadary, op. cit., p. 23.

139 Rose, Grass Roots, pp. 66–70.

140 Neil Amswych, An Interview with the Chief Rabbi. From http://www.st-and.ac.uk...jewish/sacksindex.html, February 20, 1996.


143 “For most of the last generation, the organized Jewish community in North America has had two great raisons d’être: achieving security for Israel through peace with its
neighbors and liberating Soviet Jews. Both goals may be accomplished by this century’s end. If so, what will it mean to be and especially to do Jewish?” Ibid.

144 It has been a recurrent theme since the beginning of Jewish emancipation in the 19th century that assimilated Jews who find no interest in Judaism’s multifaceted and rich religious and cultural content, may find it more interesting if one attempts to cloak an outside argument with a Jewish mantle. So Waskow’s opponent, Julian Simon, makes another suggestion: “I suggest that Jews can truly ‘build the Land’ by (say) pioneering in the construction of living habitats on Mars. The pioneers can lay the foundation for the next expansion of human population to 20 or 100 billion by creating a demonstration area on that planet – technological, political, social – that will serve as home for ten thousand or ten million Jews, where the Jewish settlement can serve as a true light to the nations. Or we can colonize the bottom of the ocean. Such activities would be a true challenge and a distinctively Jewish contribution to the Jewish and human communities.” Simon, op. cit., p. 61.

The Israeli novelist, Abraham B. Yehoshua, reveals the same attitude in another field. His more recent claim is that Israel and the Jews in the Diaspora have to look beyond the establishment of peace with the Arabs for new positive contents of collaboration. “I suggested that we try to develop some kind of a common mission toward the Third World... A specific suggestion: a joint Teaching Corps.

“There are many unemployed Jewish intellectuals in the world... Why not send them to Third World countries for a year or two to teach music, history, science, technology or computers? Jews and Israelis can participate in such a project, which will make these people available, free of charge, to the Third World. If 1,000 or 1,500 of these teachers take up posts, they will make an impact. It is also another way of bringing Jews and Israelis together for a common purpose.” Interview with A.B. Yehoshua. In: Gerstenfeld, Israel’s New Future, op. cit., pp. 196-7.

145 Reconstructionism: a Jewish religious movement founded by Mordecai M. Kaplan in 1922, and mainly active in the United States. Its central value is the survival of the Jewish people rather than the survival of specific religious beliefs or rituals: each individual must consider which rituals he wishes to practice. Reconstructionism does not believe that the Torah is Divine revelation to Moses.

146 “For some four summers, we held Friday evening services out of doors at the Jewish center of Princeton, weather permitting. The setting itself was the attractive lawn behind the sanctuary, flat but ringed by shrubs and bushes, with a number of older, substantial trees in view. The hour of the service was advanced somewhat (from eight fifteen to seven forty-five P.M.) to take full advantage of sunset, twilight, and in late summer, the dusk. Nature elements in the traditional service were emphasized; special readings appropriate to a nature setting were included in the service; periods of silence and meditations on trees and shrubs were part of the worship; and the varying qualities of the ‘twilights’ (aravitri) were also a focus of attention.

“I can report that the reaction to this, among adults as well as young people, was almost universally favorable, and often enthusiastic. In fact, except for a few occasions when the bugs were especially bothersome (no, we did not spray!), the out-of-door services were deeply appreciated by nearly all involved.

“Another practice which received a generally favorable response was connected with the morning service of Sabbaths and festivals. When there was no bar mitzvah and our numbers were not increased by people unfamiliar with the building, on bright days, temperature permitting, we would leave the sanctuary immediately after the Barchu and head out of doors. There, under the skies and in the face of the sun, we would chant together that part of the service which celebrates the gift of Light and
the radiance of the luminaries. And on days when it was not possible to go out of doors, this part of the service was prefaced by a focusing of attention on the light streaming in through the many windows in the sanctuary. In both cases, the added power of this part of the service was quite perceptible.” Everett Gendler, On the Judaism of Nature. In: James A. Sleeper & Alan L. Mintz (eds.), The New Jews. New York: Vintage Books, 1971, pp. 233–243.

147 The Eternal Light of Gendler's synagogue, Temple Emanuel in Lowell, Massachusetts, has been powered by solar energy since 1978, via panels on the building's roof. For part of the year, these provide enough energy to illuminate the Holy Ark as well. This is just one of a variety of environmental projects of the community. (Personal communication by Everett Gendler.)

148 “The mainstream Jewish community took its first steps to raise a Jewish banner on the environmental question at a conference in Washington D.C., in March 1992. The heads of every major national Jewish organization, led by Shoshana Cardin, joined with several senators and world-famous scientists like Carl Sagan and Stephen Jay Gould to call on the Jewish community to address the looming dangers of global warming and ozone depletion. The heads of rabbinical seminaries, synagogue movements and communal organizations agreed that these issues belong on the Jewish agenda.” Waskow, The Greening of Judaism, op. cit., p. 46.


150 The first specific mention of the environment as an issue of concern for the Jewish community in a joint program plan of the National Jewish Community Relations Advisory Council was in 1991–2 (p. 45). Energy had already been included in the Council’s program plans since the end of the 1970s. This organization has since changed its name to the “Jewish Council for Public Affairs”, and in its agenda for public affairs for 1998–9, environmental concerns cover nine pages out of fifty-nine.

151 COEJL, op. cit.

152 Reform Judaism is the oldest of the non-Orthodox movements, and has its origins in Germany in the early 19th century. Today, its largest community is in the United States. Its attitudes on issues changes with time, adapting to what its adherents consider appropriate for that period.

153 “Many Reform institutions have since implemented the recommendations, recycling paper and waste and encouraging the use of environment-friendly commodities. The Biblical Garden recently set up at the Sternberg Centre in London helps focus the minds of children attending the Centre's school, as well as numerous visitors, on biblical attitudes to nature.” Rose, Grass Roots, op. cit., pp. 66–67.


155 Rabkin writes: “The issue of cultural variables in science has long been controversial. The mainstream ideology of science stipulates that science is essentially transnational. To look for ethnic, national, gender-related or ideological variables in the scientific enterprise used to be deemed generally irrelevant, occasionally subversive, and in a few historical cases simply dangerous. Attempts by the Bolsheviks to distinguish between proletarian and bourgeois science resulted in the Lysenko affair. Similarly, National-Socialist policies of promoting Aryan, as opposed to Jewish, science left an indelible trauma.

"Against this background, research on Jews in the scientific profession which started in the past decade encountered vigorous opposition and resentment, particularly from..."

One may ask, in this context, whether it is coincidental that the executive director of the National Religious Partnership for the Environment is Jewish (Paul Gorman).

At a later stage the quest for Jewish environmental attitudes may be extended to searching for such expression in other forms of modern art: for example, painting and sculpture.

In his memoirs, Singer tells of his youthful preferences: “I would have gladly given up all the Talmud of the world for the neighing of this horse,” and “I managed to study the Talmud, but it was like swallowing a bitter medicine. I longed to go out in the sun, longed for the grass, the trees, man and the animals, life.” Israel J. Singer, Von einer Welt, die nicht mehr ist. Frankfurt-am-Main: Fischer, 1993, pp. 75 & 175. German.

Singer also tells the story of a cat which sat next to his grandfather, a rabbi, while he studied Judaism, and did not want to leave the room. His grandmother claimed that his grandfather loved the cat more than her, because it constantly sat next to him, whereas the grandmother did so only on very rare occasions. However, while the grandfather did not allow anybody to chase the cat out, he never touched it because “he thought it inappropriate for a Jew to caress an animal.” Ibid., p. 128.

Judaism’s ambivalent attitude toward animals is a recurrent theme in memoirs of Eastern European Jews. The former chairman of the World Zionist Organization, Nahum Goldmann, was born in a little town in Russia. He relates that his grandfather, the town doctor, was often paid by farmers in kind rather than in money. As a child, Goldmann loved animals, and on various occasions farmers gave him dogs as a present. One Shabbat morning, he rode a St. Bernard into the synagogue, causing a panic among the congregation, as several of those saw in the “innocuous animal a wild beast which would tear them to pieces. Women high up in the gallery fainted; dozens of men ran shouting out of the synagogue.” Nahum Goldmann, Mein Leben als deutscher Jude. Frankfurt am Main: Ullstein, 1980, p. 17. German.

In his memoirs, Bashevis Singer makes many references to his remoteness, in his youth, from the world of nature. He comments, for example, on the misconceptions of poor Jewish city children: “On Mirowski Place, behind the market halls, was the wholesale fruit market. The abundance of all the orchards around Warsaw was brought hither: apples, pears, cherries, sour cherries, gooseberries, currants. There too were traded strange fruits and vegetables that most Jewish children had never tasted and thought forbidden: tomatoes, cauliflowers, and green peppers.” Isaac Bashevis Singer, In My Father’s Court. New York: Noonday Press, 1967, p. 177.

“Zadok believes the moral laws of the Jews are confuted by the laws of biology which sanction, and indeed require, the Malthusian struggle for existence and catastrophic wars. ’It’s the same to nature who kills whom. For thousands of years bulls have been slaughtered and nature has kept quiet... Why should a human life be so dear to nature?… Singer believes that acceptance in any form whatever of the theory that might makes right must eventually victimize the Jews. Hence, in the dreams of Yoineh Meir, the slaughterer who, in the story of that name, forsakes his calling because he comes to believe that injustice to dumb beasts retards messianic redemption, ‘Cows assumed human shape, with beards and side locks, and skullcaps over their horns.’ Singer’s saints, like Jochanan, whose son will welcome the killing of bulls and of men, are not only troubled by the slaughter of animals but express tenderness over flies
and bugs, as if they could feel that it was to be but a short step from the metaphorical depiction of Jews as parasites to their literal extermination as bugs." Edward Alexander, The Destruction and Resurrection of the Jews in the Fiction of I.B. Singer. *Judaism*, Vol. 25 No. 1, Winter 1976, pp. 102–3.

162 1873–1934. One such poem, *The Street of the Jews*, he undertitles: "A picture of the life of the Jews in Morocco". Obviously, the poem refers to Russia, but it probably would not have passed Tsarist censorship otherwise. Another such poem he calls, with an intentional typing error, *Who knows a town to urinate?* Chayim Nachman Bialik, The complete works. 8th ed. Tel Aviv: Dvir, 1945, pp. 52 and 355–7. Hebrew.

163 Cohen continues: "He decided that he would obey the new commandments which he invented in the name of God whom he also invented. Sublime commandments which, by his own volition, would transform him into Man, toward which marvelous and desperate venture this anthropoid launched himself... This truth, I can never repeat it enough: my beloved, royal and beautiful truth. I swear it, to whoever sees it and wants to see it." Albert Cohen, *Carnets* 1978. Paris: Gallimard, 1979, p. 132. French.

164 "While the beef simmers, she talks to me about the Bible. 'Know, my son, that the Eternal, may His name be blessed, has spoken Himself to our master, Moses, who was his intimate friend, may he be blessed, and He told him that if the ass of your enemy is in difficulty, you have to help the ass, you have to lift it up gently if it has fallen, and you have to bring it back to your enemy. These are the Eternal's own words in the book which, in His great goodness, He has given to our people. Do you realise, the Eternal, King of the Universe, who is even concerned about a little ass!, isn't that a holy thing, my son?' " Ibid., p. 24.


168 The forest has a metaphorical meaning for the storyteller: "This is not yet a forest but a 'hope and assurance for the future.' " Elsewhere the watchman asks the supervisor how relevant his assignment is; he is told: "to tell the truth, I don't remember a real fire in this forest. Even nature has joined the [Zionist] enterprise." A.B. Yehoshua, *Mul haYe'arot*. In: *Kol haSippurim*. Tel Aviv: haKibbutz haMeuchad, 1993, p. 99ff. Hebrew.


170 I.e., from their graves on their way to Israel for the Resurrection.


172 "Eventually we drained the morasses, but below them we found much worse mud. The relation to the earth, the merger with nature, what are they if not decline and animalization. We created a new generation, no longer miserable and unconnected Jews, but a generation of farmers connected to their land, coarse, quarrellers, narrow-minded and thick-skinned." Ibid., p. 258.

173 I have not been able to identify any institution of higher learning anywhere which teaches Jewish environmental studies as an ongoing course. Incidental courses on sub-subjects or individual lectures are also rare. A one-time course on Jewish law and environment was taught at the Jewish Theological Seminary in New York in recent years. (Personal communication from Eliezer Diamond, who gave that course.)
Chapter Two

Modern Jewish Writers and Environmentalism: Motives, Tensions and Reactions

Introduction

In order to illuminate the meeting-place between an increasingly heterogeneous Judaism and the multi-faceted field of environmentalism, an inquiry has been made into the scholarly texts and modern essays which are pertinent to Jewish views on environmental matters.

The literature on this subject is limited. There are very few books; most of the literature consists of articles in journals. The following classification may be made:

- Publications that specifically address how Judaism views environmentalism, nature and related issues; this is the focus of this chapter.
- A broad category of articles and a few books of relevance to the subject, but which do not address Judaism and environmentalism as one theme.

First the method used to identify the articles will be explained. Motives for Jewish interest in the field and important themes will then be reviewed.

Method

Systematic research of scholarly and essay literature has been conducted on various levels. One major source is the Index to Jewish Periodicals, an author-and-subject index to more than 100 English-language journals of general and scholarly interest. I have focused on the more important general Jewish journals, in which most of the articles appear that are closest to this study's subject.

Another source is the Rambi, a Hebrew index of articles on Jewish studies published by the Jewish National and University Library, and also available on the Internet. This has yielded some insightful articles, although few in number. There are several years for which no single article is listed under the heading 'Environment'. A further search was conducted at the National Library in Jerusalem.

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The bibliography of some publications has yielded additional sources. Further articles have been obtained via other methods, such as conversations with scholars in related fields. A search via the Internet with various searching methods has yielded only marginal results.

Approximately 35 publications emerged from this search that specifically address Judaism's attitudes toward environmentalism.

No structured debate

The number of writings on environmentalism by contemporary Jewish writers is scant. This is worth underlining, as the field of environment has taken on major global interest, resulting in an ongoing stream of publications. Amongst the Jews, however, all that exists is a body of independent, mostly incidental writings.

This trickle of publications over a 30-year period relates to a large variety of issues, although several themes do sometimes recur. These include reactions to outsiders who have criticized Judaism or quotations from classical Jewish sources, whose potential connection to environmentalism is the most apparent.

Thus there is no structured Jewish debate on environmentalism. Jewish writers on the subject do not interact much with either their non-Jewish counterparts or their fellow Jews. The 'spoliation of nature' debate is among the few topics which has attracted several Jewish writers, but even here it can hardly be said that they enter into interactive polemics.

Encounters of different kinds

Indeed, Judaism's meeting with environmentalism leads to encounters of many different kinds. Occasionally, Jewish and non-Jewish writers from the environmentalist camp deal in their own ways with related problems. Sometimes similar conclusions are reached, though the reasoning is different. Issues of specific relevance to Judaism are occasionally mentioned in broad environmentalist discussions without consideration of their Jewish aspects.

While the two worlds frequently share paths and practical positions, they are sometimes also diametrically opposed. There are several frictions and potential conflicts between them.

More than 30 years after modern environmentalism's absorption into mainstream Western thinking, the process of consolidating Jewish thought on the environment is still at a very early stage. Most of its strategic beacons have yet to be lit. Its detailed topography will take a long time to develop.
The Jewish environmental discourse’s origins

For a long time, the origin of the Jewish environmental discourse has determined the tone and focus of subsequent Jewish writings on the subject. These publications have often been apologetic. They began mainly as a reaction to accusations by Lynn White and others, who claim that Bible texts justify the destruction of nature.

Out of these attacks a new stereotype began to emerge: the Bible, the holy book of the Jews – later also integrated in their canon by Christianity – was the primary idea source of the spoliation of nature. From there, the – often implicit – accusation developed that Judaism did not care about the destruction of the ecosystem.

These accusations against Judaism led slowly to a number of, mainly American, Jewish reactions to these attacks. The writers looked for a variety of issues in classical Jewish sources which expressed a concern for the environment in a manner as similar as possible to those of modern environmentalism. These were presented as ‘the Jewish position on the environment’. However, this approach fell far short of an integrated view of the subject, as will emerge later in this study.

The focus of modern Jewish reactions to the accusations was on some individual aspects of the environment problem complex, rather than on Jewish positions on environmental matters in general. Paradoxically, had it not been for these attacks, Jewish interest in environmental matters would have been even smaller and would have started later.

Specific attacks on Judaism

The ‘spoliation of nature’ debate refers to how Judaism was initially drawn into the discussion on the causes of the deterioration of the ecosystem. In the late 1960s and early ’70s, some lecturers and publications – mainly in America – claimed that Christianity and its Biblical roots had laid the ideological basis for the environmental crisis thousands of years ago.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, one Biblical text which came under particular attack was Genesis 1:28: “God blessed them and God said to them, ‘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.’ ”

Referring to the Jewish roots of Christianity’s attitudes to this issue, the American historian Lynn White Jr. stated in 1967 that this verse expressed the dualism of man and nature, and God’s will that man exploit nature for his benefit.

In his often-quoted article, *The historical roots of our ecologic crisis*, White apportioned particular blame for the present crisis to
medieval Christianity. He stated that Christianity – especially in its Western form – was the world’s most anthropocentric religion, and concludes: “Hence we shall continue to have a worsening ecologic crisis until we reject the Christian axiom that nature has no reason for existence save to serve man.”

While White did not specifically analyze Judaism’s attitudes with respect to the environment, there were a few passing references to Judaism and one accusation: “Christianity inherited from Judaism not only a concept of time as nonrepetitive and linear but also a striking story of creation. By gradual stages a loving and all-powerful God had created light and darkness, the heavenly bodies, the earth and all its plants, animals, birds, and fishes. Finally, God had created Adam and, as an afterthought, Eve, to keep man from being lonely. Man named all the animals, thus establishing his dominance over them. God planned all of this explicitly for man’s benefit and rule: no item in the physical creation had any purpose save to serve man’s purposes. And, although man’s body is made of clay, he is not simply part of nature: he is made in God’s image.”

Furthermore, historian Arnold Toynbee wrote that, while the Genesis 1:28 verse “in 1661 read like a blessing on the wealth of Abraham in children and livestock, in 1971 it reads like a license and an incentive for mechanization and pollution.”

Even before the emergence of modern environmentalism as a mainstream movement, the American conservationist Aldo Leopold had already claimed that certain Biblical passages had a negative impact on the protection of the environment: “Conservation is getting nowhere because it is incompatible with our Abrahamic concept of land. We abuse land because we regard it as a commodity belonging to us. When we see land as a community to which we belong, we may begin to use it with love and respect. There is no other way for land to survive the impact of mechanized man, nor for us to reap from it the esthetic harvest it is, capable under science, of contributing to culture.”

Further on he wrote: “In the biotic community, a parallel situation exists. Abraham knew exactly what the land was for: it was to drip milk and honey into Abraham’s mouth. At the present moment, the assurance with which we regard this assumption is inverse to the degree of our education.”

Jewish responses

Several Jewish responses to such criticism also refer to a New York Times article of 1 May, 1970 about a “Theology of Survival” conference in Claremont, California on Protestant approaches to pol-
lution. The article was entitled *Christianity Linked to Pollution*. However, its subtitle, ‘Scholars Cite Call for Man to Dominate Life’, clearly referred to the passage from the first chapter of the Bible. The article also mentioned that the “group of Protestant theologians asserted that any solution to the current environmental crisis would require major modification of current religious values.”

Eilon Schwartz, who has analyzed White's and other attacks, summarized them as follows: “Both Judeo-Christian culture and Greek-Roman culture are said to have subscribed to dogmas which are either explicitly or implicitly antagonistic to nature. They assume a categorical distinction between the human being and the rest of the natural world, a distinction which devalues the rest of the nature while it elevates human worth.”

White has made a significant impact on determining religion's image in the environmental debate. As his article has been quoted so often, his unsubstantiated statement about Judaism has been copied frequently and is still occasionally reproduced without either source of proof. So, for instance, ten years after White, the president of the European Institute of Ecology, biologist Jean-Marie Pelt, in a prize-winning book formulates it once again: “Judeo-Christianity marks, through its historic evolution, a break with nature: not feeling any obligations besides those towards God and his brothers, man undertook to liberate himself of natural constraints; but, he also found in this effort, consciously or not, an alibi for his inclination toward domination.”

More recently, Paehlke also presents the same thesis as if it no longer requires discussion. He refers to the myth of human dominance and then says: “Lynn White, Jr., and others have traced the roots of that myth back into the Judaeo-Christian past. Humanity has given itself dominion over the beasts of the field and over everything else on this planet. This arrogant self-appointment is rooted deep within our religious, philosophical, and ethical past.” Contributions to the spoliation of nature debate will be reviewed later in this chapter.

The question of animals in society

An attack of a different nature blamed Judaism for the denial of rights to animals. The 19th century philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer considered this “a barbarianism of Western society, of which the source lay in Judaism.”

J. David Bleich refers to this statement as follows: “Whether denial of rights to animals is, or is not, barbaric is a value judgment regarding which reasonable men may differ. Whether or not Judaism actually denies such rights to animals is a factual matter which is readily
discernible. The Bible abounds in passages which reflect concern for animal welfare. Concern for the welfare of animals is clearly regarded as the trait of a righteous person...” 16

The discussion on various aspects of the role of animals in society precedes mainstream environmentalism by many decades and is also, to some extent, outside it. Thus the Jewish reactions to this are also partly outside the mainstream debate on the compatibility of Judaism and environmentalism.

I. The Motives for Jewish Interest

In the mostly unstructured debate Jewish writers write from a variety of motives. They seem to share almost no common view on the subject of the environment other than the motivation to write about it, and the belief that it is a genuinely problematic issue. Jewish writers on the environment may be classified in six categories, according to their motives:

(i) those who feel the need to react to criticisms of Judaism;
(ii) those who consider the environment important to society as a whole and warranting comment from a Jewish point of view;
(iii) those who are confirmed environmentalists and seek to reconcile this with their Jewishness;
(iv) those who vehemently reject certain environmental concepts or attitudes;
(v) those who believe the environment is a useful tool for bringing Jews back into the fold of Judaism; and
(vi) those for whom nature has had a significant impact on their personal experience.

Several writers may fit into more than one of these categories.

The number of Jewish writers who explain their motives may be small, but, as will be seen, their range of viewpoints is wide: from catastrophists to ‘contrarians’. The positions they take are strongly influenced by their perception of how serious environmental threats are. Few of them attempt to substantiate their assessment of the extent of the environmental crisis.

Reviewing these motives

The writers’ motives will now be reviewed in more detail.

The first category of writers is drawn to the subject by the occasional criticism of Judaism by writers with an environmentalist interest. They cannot let such criticism pass unanswered and take offense
to attacks on the Bible and the Jewish world of thought. However, they usually agree that there are also serious environmental problems, and that Judaism should address them. This category includes writers such as Robert Gordis, Eric G. Freudenstein, Jonathan Helfand, and Norman Lamm.

Lamm reacted to the criticisms with an attack on the Protestant clergymen who participated in the earlier-mentioned symposium on "The Theology of Survival" at the School of Theology in Claremont, California. He coined their conclusions "theologian masochism" and quoted the New York Times report on the conference: "Virtually all of the scholars agreed that the traditional Christian attitude toward nature had given sanction to exploitation of the environment by science and technology and thus contributed to air and water pollution, overpopulation, and other ecological threats," and commented "In truth, such public 'theological self-flagellation' should occasion no surprise. After experiencing the convulsion of Radical Theology in the 1960s and the attempt to write the obituary for the Deity and debunk His best seller, there is nothing particularly startling about His deputies and interpreters asserting in the 1970s that religion (and in this context 'Christianity' is intended to be synonymous with Judaism, since the culprit is identified as the Bible and the 'Judaeo-Christian tradition') is responsible for our dirty planet, and that the solution requires another one of those 'major modifications' of current religious values."

In a 1996 lecture Lamm cites the elimination of species from the earth as one example of our need to deal with complex environmental problems. He then comments, perhaps ironically: "As Jews we should be particularly sensitive to the disappearance of whole species, because one imperiled species of the family of Homo Sapiens is - the Jewish people..." From there he moves to another implicit reason to refer to the subject, following up on his 1971 statements: "The ecology issue has inspired a new pollution problem - a fall-out of silliness in the theological environment. This breaks into two opposing tendencies - one highly critical of the Bible for purportedly supporting the relentless abuse of the natural environment, and the other co-opting the Bible as an uncritical ally of environmentalism."

Albert Vorspan, Michael Wyschogrod and Steven Schwarzschild belong in the second category; those who consider the subject of environment important to society as a whole, and warranting comment from a Jewish point of view.

Albert Vorspan writes: "What we face today, it is now clear, is not merely another crisis. It is the stark question of survival. In
Deuteronomy, God enjoins man: 'See, I have placed before you the blessing and the curse, life and death. So why should ye die, ye children of Israel? Therefore, choose life – choose life and live.' Whether man, in our generation, has the will to choose life will determine the destiny of the human race.'  

Wyschogrod's driving motive for attention to the subject is also the destruction of nature. He writes about the harmful effects of some technological innovations which might initially be considered harmless. "The serious condition in which the natural world finds itself... is of world-wide interest and concerns all human beings. The more specific question of Judaism and its view of the natural world is also of great importance and it has had a deep impact on our thinking in the past several decades."  

Steven Schwarzschild refers to the same issue in a paradoxical way. He acknowledges that "no reasonable person" will fail to share concerns about dwindling natural resources, and makes a distinction between a dislike of nature and disrespect: "I am known to be at odds with nature. So I am. My dislike of nature goes deep: nonhuman nature, mountain ranges, wildernesses, tundra, even beautiful but unsettled landscapes strike me as opponents, which as the Bible commands (Genesis 1:28–30), I am to fill and conquer."  

Confirmed environmentalists  

Among the confirmed environmentalists seeking ways to integrate this with Judaism, we find writers like Everett Gendler, Miryam Wyman, Jeremy Cohen, Jeremy Benstein and Eilon Schwartz. Miryam Wyman's attitude is explicit. She describes how she has tried to link her environmentalism to her Judaism: "I am a Jew and an environmentalist. For a long time I felt that these categories were at odds, or certainly not well integrated."  

For Ellen Bernstein, the founder of Shomrei Adamah, the contradiction does not seem to exist: "For me... ecology and religion – and Judaism in particular – teach the same thing. The underlying principles are interdependence and cycles. Ecology is totally about community, and Judaism is totally about community. Ecology is also about the past, about evolution. So is Judaism. Both teach us a sense of place, give us a sense of humility. They speak to the same chord inside of me."  

Two other confirmed environmentalists are somewhat self-critical. In the 1990s, Jeremy Cohen mentioned that, twenty years before, he had looked to Judaism to provide politically correct answers on ecology. Now he returned to an argument which had already been made by Helfand two decades earlier: that there is a risk that Jews,
trying to be fashionable, would over-emphasize the environment-friendly attitudes within Judaism. Lamm also draws attention to the fashionable character of environmentalism.

A similar feeling is also expressed by the environmentalist Jeremy Benstein: "Being a Jew with strong environmental concerns, one is often led to study the Sources with an eye for those particular teachings that are inspirational for – or at least compatible with – one's own predetermined 'green' positions, and thus avoid challenging oneself with texts that don’t fit current environmental wisdom. All three sides – Judaism, environmentalism, and ourselves – suffer from this sort of superficial understanding of what it means to learn Torah – or to interact with any age-old wisdom tradition.”

**Other categories**

The category of contrarians includes (albeit for different reasons) the American economist Julian Simon and the Israeli lawyer Michael Wigoda.

Arthur Waskow and Mordechai Liebling, both well-known personalities from a American Reconstructionist background, take yet another position. They consider the environment a major tool for interesting peripheral Jews in Judaism.

Reconstructionist rabbi Samuel Weintraub considers that a new ecological extension of the dietary laws may not only “enhance the observance of kashrut, but also heal the split that tragically, many Jews feel between their Jewish identity and their ethical or humanistic concerns. For both kashrut, and the modern ecology movement, are rooted in the religious quest for the purity of human origins. And the Jewish traditions of kashrut are rich enough to serve national Jewish survival, individual spiritual growth and planetary well-being.”

Michael Lerner, editor of the bi-monthly *Tikkun* magazine, suggests the institution of a sabbatical year for all humanity – though he admits that his vision may be generations away. He claims that Shabbat and the sabbatical year will help humanity to build a new attitude toward the world. In the context of the Jewish ecological movement, Lerner also claims that “the Jewish community should be at the center of ecological campaigns, and should make eco-kosher a halakhic requirement.”

The last category consists of those for whom nature has been an important personal experience. This includes writers like Gendler and Wyschogrod, who are mentioned above. Remembering his childhood, Aubrey Rose writes: “My parents were pre-1914 immigrants to Britain from East Europe where my father, like many Jews, grew
up in the countryside. As a child I was fascinated to see how he turned a few square yards of earth in the so-called garden of an East End London slum into a home for flower, vegetables, chickens, even a vine. The memory stayed with me so that gardens and flowers have since held pride of place among my interests.”

II. The Main Themes Regarding Interaction

Few Jewish writers on the environment are specialists. The main interests of most lie in other fields and their forays into this one may be considered incidental. Due to the complexity of the subject, they are not able to analyze fully Jewish attitudes to environmentalism. Thus they tend to deal only with the more accessible aspects of the subject.

It is important to note, however, that they reveal significant differences in attitude. In order to analyze Jewish publications on environmentalism, I have classified them by themes:

(i) those who refer to many aspects of environmental consciousness in Judaism, stressing harmony between Judaism and environmentalism.
(ii) those who state that the tensions between Judaism and environmentalism, emphasized by others, are over-rated;
(iii) those who express uneasiness over the relation between Judaism and environmentalism, while still referring to a partial synthesis;
(iv) those who stress tensions between environmentalism and Judaism because of an association of ‘environmental’ thinking with suspect movements and/or countries – even Nazism;
(v) those who refer to incompatibilities between environmentalism and Judaism; and
(vi) those who consider major environmental concerns as unsubstantiated.

The publications falling within these categories are not sharply defined by their authors; what is more, some may fit more than one category.

(i) Writers who refer to many aspects of environmental consciousness in Judaism, stressing harmony between Judaism and environmentalism.

A. Principles from classical sources

Several Jewish writers base their works on principles derived from classical Jewish sources, bringing illustrations from the Bible and Talmud. They usually draw on texts that emphasize regard for nature
and natural resources. From these they derive conclusions with respect to Jewish attitudes toward the environment.

One theme which occurs regularly is that day-to-day Jewish practice is defined by halakhic commandments. Rather than focusing predominantly on Jewish philosophical approaches to the environment, which mainly have to be interpreted from religious literature, one can analyze Biblical commandments and rabbinical rulings on them. This enables one to draw conclusions from a concrete base. In the next chapter the main halakhic issues will be grouped and discussed in more detail.

Gordis adheres to this view, maintaining that one does not need to “resort to inference to arrive at the fundamental Jewish teaching of man’s relationship to his environment.” He explains that it is not in abstract maxims that man’s duties and rights toward the ecosystem should be defined, as these do not obligate a practical commitment.

He also cites a number of examples of the Jewish vision of nature, concluding that there are two fundamental halakhic concepts in the Bible which guide man’s attitude toward his surroundings.

**Halakhic concepts of environmental relevance**

Gordis suggests that the first, *za’ar ba’alei hayyim*, (Hebrew for ‘the pain of living creatures’) has a corollary: the feelings of living creatures should be respected, and man should act in a spirit of mercy. He includes within this the religious laws of kosher slaughtering (*shehitah*), which are designed to sustain a reverence of life – it is forbidden to eat blood, and the pain of the animal is minimized while slaughtered. He also notes that, before Noah, God did not permit man to eat meat.

The second principle Gordis refers to is *bal tashhit* (‘do not destroy’). While the Biblical injunction refers specifically to fruit trees in times of war, Talmudic sages expanded it to forbid the destruction or damaging of anything potentially useful to man.

Basing his conclusions on the laws concerning sabbatical and jubilee years, Gordis states that, as God is the Lord of the earth and all its natural resources, “any act of destruction offends against the property of God.” Helfand also refers to *bal tashhit*, but adds to it the principle *yishbu ha-arez* or *yishbu ha-olam* (‘settling the land’ or ‘earth’). He provides examples such as the stipulation that all trees may be placed on the altar except grape vines and olive trees; he then concludes that *yishbu ha-arez* “requires man to evaluate his acts and to direct his efforts toward creating a properly balanced environment suitable for human survival and development.”
In addition to *bal tashhít*, Freudenstein considers environmentally important the Levite law stipulating that common land surrounding Levite cities could not be sold. It was also mandatory for sewage to be buried, rather than dumped in rivers or strewn across the countryside.\(^{47}\)

Drawing on Talmudic sources, Freudenstein discusses issues such as air pollution, preventing the extinction of animal species and the protection of plant varieties. To these he adds the Talmudic prohibition of raising goats and sheep in the cultivated areas of Palestine, due to the potential of these animals to cause damage to fields and plants.

David Shapiro notes that, in the Bible, man is often reminded of his responsibility to nature: “Even though man was converted into a conqueror, he was never to forget his original relationship to the earth, which was to work it and watch over it.” \(^{48}\) When Cain the farmer commits murder, it is the soil that punishes him by no longer yielding crops, forcing him to wander the earth ceaselessly. He also comments that in the time of Noah, when God decided to eliminate man from the face of the earth, His intention was not to destroy the earth itself.

Samuel Dresner and Byron Sherwin refer, *inter alia*, to two issues which concern Jewish attitudes to inanimate objects “which at first reading may seem bizarre. According to the first of these laws, when a priest ascends the altar to offer a sacrifice, he should be careful to take short steps so as not to uncover himself toward the stones which comprise the steps leading to the altar, lest the stones become insulted or embarrassed (Exodus 20:23, Rashi). According to a second tradition, still practiced in thousands of homes each shabbat, the *hallah* is covered while the *Kiddush* is being recited. According to tradition, the reason for doing so is so that the *hallah* should not be insulted or embarrassed that the blessing over the wine is said first i.e., before the blessing over the *hallah.*” \(^{49}\)

The writers claim that the consideration the Jew has toward things should be transferred to human beings, and that “for Judaism, ecological concern alone is not enough. For Jewish tradition, ecology is intertwined with ethics.” \(^{50}\)

Besides referring to several of the issues mentioned above, Ehrenfeld and Bentley reflect on the environmental meaning of the Shabbat. For them, the restraints imposed by the Shabbat commandments limit man’s stewardship of the earth. They write, “It is... the Sabbath alone that can reconcile the Jewish attitude towards nature with the attitude of secular environmentalism, of holistic ecology, or of the non-anthropocentric religions such as Jainism.” \(^{51}\)
Yehudah Levi adds another principle to the list – damage to neighbors, which in the Bible is expressed as “love your fellow as yourself.” It is in the Halakha that this abstract principle is turned into practical rules.

In his book *The Quality of the Environment*, Nachum Rakover reviews ideological and legal aspects of the environment in classical Jewish sources. He discusses how they have referred to a broad range of environmental issues, including the protection of nature, environmental pollution, noise and landscape.

Bert Keimach argues that the Bible is the key to Israel’s modern ecology: in the ancient land of Israel, the central element in people’s lives was “the interrelationship of flora and fauna in their environment, and their acceptance that the whole wonder was set in place by a Supreme Being.”

Aryeh Gotfryd, a Canadian environmentalist active in the Habad community, sees the key for the Jewish attitude to the environment in a statement by Maimonides. The latter says that man should regard himself as equally balanced between merit and guilt. Every single act can tip the balance. In a global village, every single act can affect the world’s ecological state. “The bottom line in both natural science and Torah life is that in all human deeds, speech, and even thought, one is free to choose among alternative paths leading to personal failure and ecological disaster (G-d forbid) on one hand, or personal success and global well-being on the other.”

For the physicist Herman Branover, there is a special connection between religion and ecology. His view is that the educational system should be reorganized to create “a new environmental culture”, partly based on lessons from the religious point of view and moral education.

Thus these writers provide us with a number of basic viewpoints from which Jewish attitudes to environmental issues may be extrapolated.

**B. A perspective of environmental concern**

Other writers start out from a perspective of environmental concern. We have already mentioned Wyschogrod and Schwarzschild (who is difficult to classify). In this category we also find the ‘catastrophists’ Waskow and Liebling.

Mordechai Liebling writes: “We are literally confronted with the challenge posed in Deuteronomy, ‘Choose life or choose death.’ A radical change is required now, in the way we live, if we are to survive both as a civilization and as a species. The Jewish tradition contains teachings, values and practices that can point the way to this transformation.”
Liebling refers to tensions within Judaism. He confronts man’s anthropocentric attitude with “the notion that divinity is present in all aspects of creation, which is designed for all of us to share.” He concludes that, as Judaism has recognized this friction, “the Jewish laws seek to protect creation by putting limits on humanity’s egoism.” 61

Arthur Waskow claims that the North American Jewish community is an “endangered people” and that “both the earth and the Jewish people” are “in trouble”. He views the act of addressing the environmental crisis as a tool for bringing assimilated Jews back into the Jewish fold.62

**The proposed Jewish agenda**

Several of the writers in the first sub-category above recognize in Judaism a potential to make an original contribution to environmental thinking; others feel an almost desperate need to make the two more compatible, as will be seen below.

“We need an understanding of theology that affirms the sanctity of the natural world,” writes Liebling. “We need an eco-kashrut, which searches for the divine relationship between what we eat and the environment.” 63

Liebling continues: “We need to take a hard look at the system that organizes our eating – kashrut – and transform that system into one that truly upholds the holiness of life. How much pollution does the production of this food incur? How much did the animal suffer? Was the production of this food an efficient use of the world’s available resources?” 64

**Public and community policies**

Waskow also proposes the development of an ‘eco-kosher’ mentality, where Jewish institutions assess their food and consumer purchases on the basis of the harm done to the environment by these products and services. In a broader sense, Waskow wishes to change the internal behavior of the Jewish community with regard to energy, automobiles, food conservation and investment.65

In recent years, public policy-makers in the Western world have been searching for methods with which to assess the environmental impact of the production, consumption and disposal of different products. Liebling and Waskow allocate the term ‘kosher’ to some aspects of this life-cycle assessment methodology, but it has no basis at all in Jewish tradition.

In another article, Waskow considers proposing to the American nation the creation of new festivals based on the ‘environmentally respectful pause’ of Sabbath, the Feast of Tabernacles and Passover
(Shabbat, Sukkot and Pesach): “We might create national festivals – one day a week, a month or a year – when highways and airports as well as factories and offices shut down and neighborhoods share foods, songs, crafts and stories and in grass-roots town meetings we explore protecting the earth.”

In 1992, Waskow claimed that the American Jewish community should take action in the sphere of public policy. “For example: we could decide that to prevent global warming we will actively campaign to reduce the use of oil and gasoline throughout North American society, and substitute the use of renewable energy. We could actively urge and assist Israel to make itself (and its unemployed new immigrant technologists and engineers) a world center for earth-sensitive technology, including solar heating and solar-electric automobiles.” He links this with the fact that the greatest threat of an anti-Israel bias in U.S. policy comes from the oil companies.

Adam Jackson is another catastrophist who considers that humanity is destroying the earth with such speed that the planet’s survival is at risk. For him, the solution to the environmental crisis lies in a radical change of diet, particularly in eating less meat. He considers this the single most important issue at the root of the environmental debate.

Judaism, nature and the Holocaust

Among those who find harmony between Judaism and the natural world, a unique position is held by Eric Katz, who defines himself as a secular environmental philosopher. He asks whether his work has “any relevance to an understanding of the evil of human genocide? Can the study of genocide teach us anything about the human-induced destruction of the natural world, what is sometimes called the process of ‘ecocide’?”

On a journey to the concentration camps in Eastern Europe, Katz set out to comprehend the extent of the German evil in the genocide of the Jews. He then discovered that the beauty of nature at the sites prevented him “from seeing, understanding, and feeling the true dimensions of the traces of the evil” confronting him.

Katz postulates that there is a relation between the environmental crisis and the Holocaust. The control of nature and of humanity are linked. Anthropocentrism means not only domination of nature, but also leads to the domination of other human beings. “Genocide and ecocide are similar in that we conceive of our victims as less than human, as outside the primary circle of value.”

He concludes that the continuity of the Jewish people is warranted because they pass on their traditions and culture to the next genera-
tion. Humanity must pass on to its children the idea of the preservation of nature as part of its tradition. This will make people understand that man’s power has to be controlled; this in turn will halt the destruction both of mankind and the natural environment.

When Katz derives a parallel from the Holocaust experience between domination over nature and nations, he is basically restating a concept inherent in Judaism. Halakha restrains control not only of nature – as will be seen in the next Chapter – but also of other human beings. The latter is expressed, for example, in the Halakhic laws with respect to the attitude to non-Jewish slaves or a Jew’s marrying of female captives.

(ii) Writers who state that the tensions between Judaism and environmentalism, emphasized by others, are over-rated.

In another category of publications, it is argued that some of the tensions between Judaism and environmentalism mentioned by others are exaggerated. Many of these publications refer to the spoliation of nature accusations. Here we find several writers who were also quoted in the first category.

In 1970, Freudenstein elaborated on a series of passages from the Bible and the Talmud to “disprove the repeated statements in the popular press that the Judeo-Christian concept’ of Genesis 1:28 is the cause of the destruction of our environment by western civilization.”

He considers that “it is man’s misunderstanding of this Scriptural concept and his insensitivity to the Holy Writ’s concern for God’s nature that should be accused. The concern for the ‘guarding of the garden’ in which man has been placed by Providence is implicit in the Scriptural message. It has been made explicit in the Jewish tradition as formulated in the Biblical exegesis of the Rabbis and in the legal ordinances of the Talmud.”

Gordis

In another early modern Jewish article on the subject, Gordis reacted to the implied accusation that Judaism was responsible for the spoliation of nature. Addressing the way in which Jews interpret the words ‘and subdue it’, Gordis writes, “The unsensational truth is that this passage in Genesis was never invoked in order to establish a principle of action by man vis-a-vis the environment. In fact, the Talmud, by a method of interpretation all its own, related ‘and subdue it’ to the first part of the sentence ‘be fruitful and multiply’. It then declared that since subduing enemies in war is primarily a male
undertaking, the verb ‘subdue’ teaches that the obligation to propa­
gate the human race falls upon the male rather than the female.” 75, 76

When Gordis published his book Judaic Ethics for a Lawless  World, he repeated the point: “Judaism’s teachings about man’s duties and rights vis-a-vis his natural habitat are not to be sought in high-sound­
ing phrases which obligate him to nothing concrete; rather, they will be found in specific areas of Jewish law and practice.” 77 He expanded on this, citing further examples that refute the claim that the philo­
sophy to be found in Judaism favors the destruction of nature.

In a later article, Gordis analyzes some of the messages in the Book of Job, concluding that “Man is not the goal of creation and, therefore, not the master of the cosmos...” 78

For Monford Harris, Jews have indeed accepted uncritically that nature is an object, that it is impersonal and can be manipulated. He sees the need for a new Jewish approach to the natural world, based on the concept of the covenant. In his opinion, man has a “covenantal relationship, community, with the natural world. Because of this covenantal relationship man cannot ‘solely prevail’.” 79 The covenant is the essence of Jewish particularity. In his opinion, it has a universal environmental message for mankind.

Rabbi Kook

Norman Solomon, editor of the British journal Christian Jewish Relations, quotes Rabbi Kook in his interpretation of Genesis 1:28. He concludes: “So perverse is it to understand ‘and rule over it’... as meaning ‘exploit and destroy’ (is that what people think of their rulers?) that many Christians take such interpretations as a deliberate attempt to besmirch Christianity and not a few Jews have read the discussions as an attempt to ‘blame the Jews’ for yet another disaster in Christendom.” 80

Solomon compares Christian and Jewish attitudes on the issue of stewardship or domination: “There has been discussion among Chris­
tian theologians as to whether the opening chapters of Genesis call on humans to act as the stewards and guardians of creation or to dominate and exploit it. There is no such discussion among Jewish theologians, to whom it has always been obvious that when Genesis states that Adam was placed in the garden ‘to till it and to care for it’ (2:15), it means just what it says. As Rabbi Kook put it: ‘No rational person can doubt that the Bible, when it commands people to ‘rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the sky and all living things that move on the earth’", does not have in mind a cruel ruler who exploits his people and servants for his own will and desires – God forbid that such a detestable law of slavery (be attributed to God) who “is good to all and
his tender care rests upon all his creatures” (Psalms 145:9) and “the world is built on tender mercy” (Psalms 89:3)."

On the other hand, Rakover also refers to Rabbi Kook’s interpretation of ‘to rule’, but does not limit himself to environmentally-inclined traditions. He quotes the Spanish medieval commentator Nachmanides on verse 1:26, who says that man “will rule with strength the fish”, and explains that man will use his power to extract copper and iron from the earth. He interprets the phrase ‘to rule’ as the manner with which an owner rules (over) a slave.

Rakover favors keeping an appropriate proportion between protecting the environment and protecting man. That means inequality between man and animal, and man’s limited ownership of nature. Love for nature should not be put before love for man: “We should be careful not to reach the levels of those who were known as animal lovers, but did not refrain from doing the worst possible things to man.”

**Linguistic interpretation**

Meanwhile, describing the right that God has given man to use the environment without abusing it, lawyer Bernard Weissman gives a philological explanation of the verse in Genesis: “In fact... the Hebrew word for subdue, *koveish*, means not to plunder but to make useful, and the Hebrew word for dominion, *r’du*, implies not a dictatorship but a protectorship. God was giving humankind the right to use our environment but not to abuse it – to use it with care and foresight and restraint.”

Ehrenfeld and Bentley point out that the word ‘dominion’ obscures a certain facet of the original Hebrew. They quote Rashi on Genesis 1:26: “The Hebrew ‘yirdu’ connotes both ‘dominion’ (derived from *radah*) and ‘descent’ (derived from *yarad*): when man is worthy, he has dominion over the animal kingdom; when he is not, he descends below their level and the animals rule over him.” Here is a whole dimension of meaning which cannot be conveyed by an English translation.

Along similar lines, Jeremy Cohen searches for an interpretation of the grammatically ambivalent text. He interprets “and rule the fish of the sea” to mean “they will descend” or “they will be ruled” rather than “they will rule.”

J. Cohen devotes an entire book to that one Genesis verse. He systematically analyzes its Jewish and Christian interpretations over the centuries, and reaches the conclusion that pre-modern readers – both Jewish and Christian – “found in it relatively little bearing on the natural environment and its exploitation. Rather, God’s initial words to human
beings, especially those words mandating sexual reproduction, repeatedly raised the theological issue of divine covenant.”

Basing his interpretation on ancient Jewish sources, he combines the two parts of the verse to explain its meaning: “Sexuality and the divine image are the defining characteristics of the human being, and their proper expression leads directly to the reward of dominion.”

In his book, J. Cohen reaches two conclusions relevant to our subject. The first is that there is no substance to the ecology-oriented thesis of White and others: their interpretation of the verse has few, if any, roots in pre-modern Judaism and Christianity. Secondly, the focus on classical interpretations of the verse concerned other matters: “God’s relationship with all humanity” and “the tension between that universal commitment and God’s election of a single people.”

Biblical texts can indeed be interpreted in many ways. Personal attitudes and Zeitgeist influence commentators, even if their general approach remains within the Jewish tradition.

Answering Toynbee

Jewish writers on this specific subject have devoted much greater attention to White than to Toynbee. The reactions to Toynbee, however, are much more forceful due to his many prior attacks on Judaism. Indeed, for many decades his publications have touched a raw nerve in Jews.

Trude Weiss-Rosmarin, the editor of the Jewish Spectator, writes: “Historian Arnold J. Toynbee, who is known for perspicacity in tracing most evils of Western society to the ‘Judaic’ legacy of Christianity, recently ‘discovered’ that the population explosion and ecological crisis derive from – the ‘Old Testament’.”

After quoting Toynbee’s claims and stating that Ian McHarg and Lynn White Jr. had anticipated him, she quotes Henlee H. Barnette’s The Church and the Ecological Crisis: “To hold that Genesis 1:28 provides a blank check for man to exploit nature is bad hermeneutics. When man is viewed from the perspective of the total teaching of the Bible, one gets a radically different view of him and his relation to nature.”

Similarly, Shapiro states: “In some recent writings, among them by the virulent anti-Jewish and anti-Israel Arnold Toynbee, we find the Bible blamed for man’s misuse of nature.” He then challenges the basic concept that paganism is more pro-nature than the Bible. “That pagan man has produced some of the greatest destroyers of nature is apparently ignored. Pagan man worshipped all forces of nature, the good and the bad. There was no more divinity attached to beneficence than to destructiveness. Aphrodite-Venus is a goddess
and Ares-Mars is a god. Krishna, the beneficent, and Shiva, the destroyer, are both gods. Why should paganism be more concerned with the preservation of nature than the Bible? Everything that we have stated in the course of this paper points in the very opposite direction.  

Saul Berman’s view is that Toynbee wants to revert to pagan, pre-Christian sacralization of nature, and doesn’t comprehend Jewish teaching on the subject of the environment. This means that Toynbee is willing “to abandon the entire moral progress which humanity has made under Jewish influence... What price environmentalism!”

Aldo Leopold’s accusations, however, hardly drew Jewish reactions. Martin D. Yaffe, who analyzed his remarks on Abraham as well as some on Homer’s *Odyssey*, thought it possible that Leopold suffered from a “scholarly- or rather unscholarly - vice of presumptuousness, i.e. of simply extending, uncritically or unreflectively, habits of thought appropriate to one area of study headlong into other areas...”

**Be fruitful and multiply**

The main criticism of Genesis 1:28 was directed toward the second part of the sentence, which mentions “dominion of the earth.” Gordis elaborated on the first part “that the obligation to ‘be fruitful and multiply’ is fulfilled in rabbinic law when two children are born to a family. The only point at issue is the sex of the children: while the school of Shammai requires that there be two sons, the school of Hillel requires one son and one daughter.”

Among modern Jewish writers, Dresner and Sherwin are strongly in favor of population control, saying that the world cannot support the present birthrate. They comment: “Neither war, disease nor the most severe famine of modern times decimated as many people of the world over as one racist madman did the Jews.” Despite this fact, the average Jewish birthrate is below the average birthrate in Western countries. They conclude: “When a Jew advocates population control, it is not a case of urging others to do what one will not do personally; it is obvious that Jews in western countries, no matter what the reasons, are presently limiting their offspring.”

**Novak’s challenge**

More pointed still than White’s challenge is that posed by David Novak. Discussing the threats linked to nuclear technology, he points out that contemporary threats are different from those that began with Cain, when people began to destroy others: “The epitome of human technology is not human destruction of other humans per se but, rather, the threat of humankind’s being destroyed by the tech-
nical environment of its own making.”  He adds: “Our concern now is with life before death much more than life after death.”

Novak’s comments refer to an aspect of Genesis which White does not address: “For a Jewish theologian… the charge must be faced that the Hebraic doctrine of the all-powerful and authoritative God and the human person created in the image of this God is itself largely responsible for the stance toward the environment that has led to the threat of the destruction of humankind and its earthly dwelling.”

Novak then investigates what theological answers classical Judaism offers the challenge to its tradition “whose doctrine of the essence of humanness is now judged to be the source of death.” He finds these in the meaning of the Shabbat. Rest on Shabbat is equally valid for all creatures, including animals. The restraint which the Shabbat laws impose sends the moral message to mankind not to exploit the destructive capabilities of the technical environment that it has developed.

However, Louis Jacobs claims that Judaism has very little to say about contemporary environmental problems: “The problem is essentially a new one, caused by the proliferation of vast industries… It is futile, therefore, to expect any direct guidance from the Jewish tradition.” He sums up his position by saying: “The problem today can only be tackled with the help of experts who can advise how to exercise sufficient control over what we do so as not to impoverish the world. Obviously, Judaism cannot have anything to say about how these experts should go about achieving their aims or even whether all their dire warnings are justified. But it is clear that Judaism affirms without reservation that the world is God’s creation and that whoever helps to preserve it is doing God’s work.”

(iii) Writers who express uneasiness while still referring to a partial synthesis.

In 1991, Lawrence Troster, a member of the editorial board of Conservative Judaism, examined the possibility of reconciling Jewish and environmental positions. While basing his argument partly on that of White, he pointed out that, from the biocentric perspective of deep ecology, “God, as the transcendent creator, is also seen as separate from nature, thus desacralizing the environment and furthering humanity’s alienation from nature. The solution, according to some biocentrists, lies in a return to a pantheistic conception of God, nature, and humanity.” From an environmental perspective, Troster also states that “Jewish concern for the environment is fundamentally utilitarian: human beings must preserve, protect, and not squander the environment, in striving to attain the goal of creating
the Kingdom of God upon earth. Nature is precious as a creation of God; it is not sacred in and of itself.”

Despite this, however, he answers in the affirmative the question, “Can a Gaian, or biocentric approach be incorporated with a Jewish perspective on the environment?”

In his 1994 Masters thesis on the subject of environmental ethics, E. Schwartz states that “there is something to be learned in the meeting between particularly Jewish and particularly modern ethical dilemmas as to the human responsibilities to the natural world.” He argues that the comparison between the two “suggests that traditional Jewish categories allow us to speak a richer language of ethics than contemporary modern categories with regard to our duty to animals and the rest of nature, similar to a language of ethics emerging from the environmental critique of contemporary culture.”

Schwartz is one of the few Jewish writers to systematically review the tensions between Judaism and environmentalism in the specific fields of causing pain to animals and wanton destruction. Unlike most others, who view the subject on the basis of a limited number of (usually not dispassionately-selected) sources, Schwartz researches more methodically the wealth of Jewish tradition in these specific areas.

**Toward a more modest society**

Saul Berman states that Judaism indeed addresses “the relationship between persons and nature”. However, modern society’s central pre-occupation with environmentalist concerns should not replace Judaism. One should search instead to find elements of Judaism which refer to them.

According to Berman, the pollution caused by humanity does not threaten the earth: its main potential victim is humanity. If the latter were to be wiped off, part of God’s ‘experiment on the earth’ would have ended. Thus mankind has to be saved from itself.

Teaching the Torah constitutes just such a rescue. Judaism underlines that the entire world belongs to God. Love of God means that one should also protect the earth which is His property. Mankind must be re-educated toward humility and moderation. Berman sees in this more modest humanity the solution to environmental problems. He counterposes the Hebrew term *hazalah* (saving) as the short-term rescue, with *anavah* (humility) as the road to long-term rescue.

**Judaism’s balanced view**

Bradley Shavit Artson can also be included among those who search for a partial synthesis of Judaism and environmentalism. He claims that there are three major ways to understand humanity’s
relationship with the earth: “As a machine to be used and discarded at will; as a living organism of superior worth to humanity itself; or somewhere in the middle – subject to the kind of human use that is constrained by larger ethical considerations. All three viewpoints can claim an ancient and venerable pedigree within Western civilization and are quite incompatible.”

Artson rejects the mechanistic approach associated with Stoic thinking and the philosophy of Descartes: “Seeing the earth as a big bag of toys encourages rapacity and endangers human survival and the balance of life on earth. The time has long passed when this was an acceptable way to see our role in the world.” Similarly, he rejects the concept that the earth is a living organism: “Who can say whether or not the earth is better off with living things or without? With mammals dominant rather than roaches? Perhaps the earth is indifferent, or would even like an extra strip mall? Only people argue about such things and seem to express strong preferences. The earth just keeps circling the sun.”

Artson concludes that a balanced position between the two extremes is one of stewardship, which has its roots in religion. Man uses the earth’s resources, acting as its guardian on behalf of God – a charge to be executed responsibly.

This position shares with the mechanists the idea that morality can only be determined from a human point of view, but desires to avoid unnecessary suffering to other creatures. It also has something in common with the Gaiaists, i.e., “a sense that holiness and wholeness emerge from the wonder and the miracle of God’s world.” On the other hand, those who accept the stewardship position, refuse “to deify any part of creation, humanity included.”

While Michael Gillis criticizes the extremism of some of the ecologists’ claims, he considers that Judaism takes a balanced view. As the main basis for this claim, he cites the commemoration of Creation in the Shabbat laws. In his opinion, Shabbat does not “deny the value of human creativity but puts it into perspective. It in essence stands for a limited ecologism.”

(iv) Writers who stress tensions between environmentalism and Judaism because of an association of ‘environmental’ thinking with suspect movements and/or countries – even Nazism.

A. The link with National Socialism and paganism

A number of elements in modern environmentalism may evoke associations with Nazism. Jewish publications have not dealt exten-
sively with the ideology behind the movement; and Jewish writers have written little— as Jews— about these associations. This needs to be seen in the context of the modest Jewish interest in environmentalism in general.

The link between environmentalism and Nazism has been analyzed by a few writers, both Jewish and non-Jewish. Among these, Robert Pois (Jewish) and Luc Ferry (non-Jewish) are worth noting. Historian Simon Schama points out that the Reich’s Game Law was enacted by Goering, and “provided capital punishment for anyone with the temerity to kill an eagle. Vivisection was prohibited on pain of deportation or of being dispatched to a concentration camp where the medical staff was less fussy about operating on humans than hounds.”

J. David Bleich, who discusses the halakhic attitude to vegetarianism, links the Germans’ concern with animal welfare to their disregard for human beings. When discussing Rabbi Kook’s position on vegetarianism, he states: “In an insightful psychological observation, Rabbi Kook remarks that even individuals who are morally degenerate seek to channel their natural moral instincts in some direction. Frequently, they seek to give expression to moral drives by becoming particularly scrupulous with regard to some specific aspect of moral behavior. With almost prescient knowledge of future events, Rabbi Kook argues that, were vegetarianism to become the norm, people might become quite callous with regard to human welfare and human life and express their instinctive moral feelings in an exaggerated concern for animal welfare. These comments summon to mind the spectacle of Germans watching with equanimity while their Jewish neighbors were dispatched to crematoria and immediately thereafter turning their attention to the welfare of the household pets that had been left behind.”

To add a minor observation: Among the large number of discriminatory laws against the Jews in the pre-World War years, the Nazis included one forbidding the Jews to have courier pigeons. Albert Cohen writes that he is not surprised that, in view of their closeness to animals, the Hitlerian ‘People of Nature’ detested ‘Israel, people of anti-nature’.

Modern nature religion

The perceived (neo-) pagan or quasi-religious character of some environmentalist currents is also discussed by several Jewish writers. Wyschogrod differentiates between two ecological concepts. The first one he calls ‘lower ecology’, which involves “protecting human beings against the damage of technology”. The second one, ‘upper
ecology’, is a “conviction about the holiness of nature”, which reveals a biocentric character.

Wyschogrod sees a clear relation between ‘upper ecology’ and both Nazism and paganism.\(^\text{130}\) He points out that Hitler’s thought was heavily influenced by evolutionary concepts: “The stronger kills the weaker, and it is through this process that nature moves ahead. Hitler, of course, did not invent this theory. It has deep roots in Nietzsche.” \(^\text{131}\)

For Wyschogrod, evolutionary thinking is a modern nature religion as “the basic conflict between nature and history is the conflict between the moral and the natural”.\(^\text{132}\) It is in the name of evolutionary thinking that the Nazis started to murder the handicapped, considering their lives ‘worthless’. This policy preceded the murder of the Jews, and developed some of their techniques for mass destruction.

Walter Laqueur finds certain affinities between the Nazis and the Greens: “‘Blind industrialization’, ‘materialist consumerism’, soulless modern society and generally speaking the excesses of modern technology were strongly opposed by the Nazi party, which always stressed the need to return to nature, to a simpler and healthier life.” \(^\text{133}\)

Michael Gillis also underlines the pagan aspects of environmentalism: “Genesis can be read as a polemic against the pagan world view in which creation is a product of mythical struggles between gods... Nature is infused with the power of the divine and gods are personifications of the forces of nature. In this view where there is power and there is life, there is divine power and divine life...” \(^\text{134}\)

Gillis continues: “This pagan view can give rise to worship of animals, the sea, the soil or whatever. People are subject to these divinities and can only seek harmony with them. Such a view is manifestly ecological... Ecologism is thus secular paganism.” \(^\text{135}\) For Gillis, the philosophical roots of this are the pantheism of Spinoza and the Romantics, as well as the vitalism of Bergson, with which an ethical element is fused to care for the earth, regarded by some as a living being.

Judaism, on the other hand, has always opposed the power of nature and submission to it; it permits submission to God alone. It is for this reason that Judaism is irreconcilable with the type of environmentalism which sees in the planet the supreme being of ethical concern.

B. The German Green movement

Since the Holocaust any major German development has continued to evoke caution in both Israel and the Jewish Diaspora.\(^\text{136}\) The
emergence of radical movements in Germany, on both sides of the political spectrum, has been no exception to this.

Is there no parallel to be found between the fanaticism of some currents of the German Green movement (proponents of the purity of nature) and that of their grandfathers (proponents of the purity of race)? Has the Nazi concept of ‘blood and soil’ been transformed into ‘soil’ alone? At least the newer, Green phenomenon seems to be headed in a less dangerous direction.137

The active German element in European Green politics, and the fact that environmentalism’s character is felt to lend itself easily to abuse, are potential causes for unease among Jews. This is exacerbated by the sometimes extreme anti-Israeli position of members of the German Greens or Green party members of the European Parliament from other nations.

The Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs has a specific policy for dealing with European neo-Fascists, but has no parallel policy with regard to Green parties. Israeli policy-makers do not seem to view the latter as a serious threat as they are considered democratic. In Austria, for example, some Israeli diplomats have viewed them positively as allies in combating neo-Fascism.138

While anti-Zionism is clearly present in Green politics, classic anti-Semitism rarely emerges.139 Several writers argue, however, that anti-Zionism is a new, more socially palatable form of anti-Semitism, while the old one has not disappeared.140 As the Greens usually consider themselves progressive, one would also have to assess to what extent the anti-Zionist attitudes of some of them fit into the often-described anti-Zionist campaigns of the German New Left, which are said to “have an unequivocally anti-Semitic character”.141

Anti-Semitism exists on the right as well as on the left of the European political spectrum, and is also linked to the fact that there is a long tradition in both of open anti-Semitism. In the specific and as-yet undeciphered case of the European Greens, it may be less true.

C. Animal rightists

The perceived partial recycling of pagan thoughts in modern environmentalism is most clearly revealed in some currents of the animal rights movement. While it is true that there is a difference between venerating animals and arguing that they are similar to man, for Judaism (among others) the latter argument is heresy.

Occasionally, anti-Semitism has been mentioned in the context of the American animal rights movement.142 One conflict which preceeds modern environmentalism by many years is the subject of
Jewish ritual slaughter. Over the decades, Orthodox Jewry has made major efforts to defend itself against the accusations that ritual slaughter is cruel to animals. Attacks on this tradition have led to the banning of shehitah, for instance, in Switzerland, and in 1997 the issue was much debated in Denmark.

Zvi Shinover and Yitzchak Goldberg, both rabbis, consider the Torah’s views antithetical to those of the Greens. However, they seem to confuse animal rightists and environmentalists, stating that, for the Greens: “animals are in the center and the individual morality of man doesn’t interest them. According to the Torah, man and his morality are central, and only therefrom derives the obligation to deal with animals with mercy and not with cruelty.”

They consider Rabbi Kook’s writings to be prophetic of our times. They conclude: “To our regret, many of the Greens ‘engage in moral libertarianism, anti-Semitism, anarchism and other inferior behavior’. According to the words of the late Rabbi Kook, this is a result of the boundaries between man and animal becoming vague, which results from an exaggerated identification with the animal and a lack of acknowledgment of the spiritual superiority of man over the animal.”

(v) Writers who refer to incompatibilities between environmentalism and Judaism.

A. Deep ecology/neo-paganism

Wyschogrod states that “upper ecology is ‘nature religion’, primarily a religious attitude toward nature... In relationship to the divine, upper ecology usually expresses itself as polytheism, the theological view that there are many gods. These gods dwell within the forces of nature and are symbols of these forces.”

Among the writers studied, Wyschogrod is the one who most unequivocally equates currents of environmentalism with paganism. Still, he is torn between his understanding that it is dangerous – especially for Jews – to worship nature, and his fear that there is a relation between the desacralization of nature and its destruction. His ambivalence is so deep that he even wonders whether the prophets in the Bible “gave a really fair presentation of the point of view and theology of the worshippers of Baal and Ashteret.”

Michael Wigoda attacks environmentalism, basing his statements on Ferry’s publications. Wigoda states: “The environmental movements, and in particular its militant arms, such as Greenpeace, enjoy much public sympathy. Also, in the eyes of those who are not en-
gaged in active struggle, these movements enjoy esteem for their blessed work for humanity.

"It is my intention to show that, behind these pleasant ecological movements, hides an extreme neo-pagan ideology of which the dangers for humanity are greater than its usefulness. Opposed to that stands the environmental approach which draws from Judaic sources." 148

In a milder tone, Meir Tamari touches on the same issue: "... this theme of the importance of nature and all its components, together with the beauty thereof, must not lead us to misunderstand or to read into Judaism things which are not there. It is easy in our involvement with environmental movements not to be aware of the element of idolatry in the form of the soul and the spirit of the wind or the water. Nature is only a creation of God's so that none of the natural elements have a power or a value of their own, over and above that given to them by God, the Creator." 149

One of the first Orthodox thinkers to address neo-pagan tendencies was Aharon Lichtenstein, head of the Alon Shvut Yeshiva in Israel. He views as idolatrous that part of the environmental movement which views nature as holy.150

As quoted before, Lamm had referred to "co-opting the Bible as an uncritical ally of environmentalism." He explains: "This latter trick is achieved by a strategy of putting their ideas into the mouth of the Bible. Thus, at the recent World Ecology Conference, it was maintained that all of nature is 'sacred'." (Lamm declined to participate in the conference because of that statement.) "There is something atavistically pagan about this worship of the earth; the first verse of the Torah immediately establishes the incommensurability of Creator and creation when it tells us that God created the heavens and the earth." 151

E. Schwartz points out that, within the modern environmental movement, a large number of writers show an interest in a rebirth of paganism and a rejection of monotheism. After referring to Lynn White's observations, Schwartz states: "Some ecofeminists have called for a renewal of pagan customs of May day, celebrations of the moon, and witchcraft; one of the more radical biological theories of our day hold that the earth is a living organism, and has named her Gaia, the name of the Greek earth goddess." 152 In his view, Judaism is as ideologically opposed to neo-paganism today, just as it was opposed to paganism in Biblical times.153

Without referring specifically to environmentalism, philosopher Bernard-Henri Levy confronts the reading of the Bible with contemporary paganism: "There is nothing common between the meditation
of a text which always specified the struggle against idolatry and the resurgence of the 'sacred' which sings us so often the refrain of modernity. It is even against these resurgences, these regressions, and somber romanticisms, which the latter sometimes affords itself, that there is value in betting on the Name and the cold shine of the flame where I put all my hope." 154

B. Environmentalism as a quasi-religion

There are also other reasons for Jewish concern. Modern environmentalism began to emerge when people in an increasingly valueless world started searching for new ideologies. Certain currents of environmentalism demonstrate elements of a non-formalized religion which help to fill the void in belief of secularized people. For example, one finds references to claims that the evils of pollution will turn against the polluters, as an act of a higher, albeit non-Divine, justice. 155 The flooding of part of the world as a result of global warming is one example, but there are also others. The quasi-religious character of certain currents of environmentalism are difficult to assess; however, while indicators of this phenomenon are often weak, they should not be overlooked.

The ideological perception of nature as good and the city as bad is a rather oblique stereotype which many associate with environmentalism. This correlates with the frequent belief that what is natural is benign and what is man-made is potentially dangerous. 156 Ideological attitudes in favor of recycling are another example of the seemingly semi-belief aspects of environmentalism. 157 To what extent they are indeed pseudo-religious expressions remains an open question.

Lamm states: "Ecology as a movement sometimes acts as a quasi-religion, one which blinds itself to the cost that it imposes on society: severe restraints upon industry with resultant economic harm to society." 158 He then quotes the observation by John Tierney of the New York Times on "recycling as a transcendental experience."

(vi) Writers who consider major environmental concerns as unsubstantiated.

The beliefs of Jewish writers concerning the environment overlap with many of those in general society. Thus we also find ‘contrarian’ voices among the Jewish writers, who consider the main environmental concerns as unsubstantiated.

Julian Simon claims that the world is becoming a better, rather than a worse, place for humans to live in: “By any agreed-upon
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objective measures of human welfare, the people of the world as a whole, the citizens of the U.S., and Jews at large are better off now than before."  

"As an issue, the environment is about as distinctively Jewish as white bread," writes Simon in a discussion with Waskow in the periodical *Moment.*

Another writer who does not believe that there is reason for alarm is Max Singer. He states that, while there is much hunger in the world, the percentage of hungry people has declined drastically. The main cause of famine is political rather than an excess of people in the world. With the possible exception of energy, very few natural resources are becoming scarcer, and their importance for the economies of various nations is continuously declining.

Singer sees three consecutive stages in the environmental development of nations: "... first poverty and natural environment, then development and environmental destruction, leading later to wealth and environmental cleanup... the risk of environmental catastrophe is low and probably getting lower (because we are increasing our responsibility to respond to environmental problems). The danger from people badly acting to other people is much greater than the danger from the environment."

Singer states that one of Judaism's strengths is the "discipline of expressing new ideas in terms of traditional sources. These values can help protect us from dangerous and unnecessary radical changes."

In light of this, he considers that Jewish values are needed in areas other than "non-existing global crises, or... the declining amounts of hunger and poverty."  

III. Additional Themes

**Jews, cities, apologies**

Reference must also be made to one additional theme in some of the publications quoted above. Several writers refer, sometimes apologetically, to the urban character of the Jewish people as a possible explanation for their apparent lack of interest in the environment. The uneasy feeling about this aspect of Jewish Diaspora life mainly focused, in the past, on socio-economic realities, mingling anti-Semitic projections and acquired self-images.

More than 50 years before Jewish environmentalists, A.D. Gordon lamented the lack of contact with the natural world among contemporary Jews. Gordon's almost messianic perception of the city versus nature stereotype is not far from the claim that Jews are not
linked to the soil. For many decades, this argument was connected to anti-Semitism. It was linked to accusations that Jews were predominantly city-dwellers and not agriculturalists.

Leading non-Jewish thinkers such as Max Weber and Werner Sombart have claimed that the Jewish isolation and ghettos were voluntary rather than imposed. The ongoing flow of accusations has also created Jewish self-images confirming this ‘rootlessness’.

When discussing Judaism and environmentalism in 1970, Freudenstein considers that the conditions for a more active Jewish role in society exist today, including greater involvement in environmental matters. This contrasts with the past, when Jews who lived in urban ghettos had “to struggle for survival in a hostile world which they were powerless to influence.” Aryeh Strikovsky takes a similar position, saying that “the love of Jews for nature was ruptured by 2000 years of harsh exile.”

**Misjudging Hasidism**

In 1985 David Ehrenfeld and Philip Bentley wrote that “it is not surprising that most people, including most Jews, are unaware that Judaism was one of the first great environmental religions – that it speaks of humanity, land, and nature not in vague generalities but in great depth and detail and with a wisdom that seems to grow more appropriate and profound with each passing decade.”

They give the reason for this lack of awareness: “During the past millennium or more of Jewish history, the Jews have become, partly by choice but mostly by force, an increasingly urban people. Hedged in by laws restricting land ownership, occupations, and dwelling places, especially in Christian Europe, they often found themselves living in crowded ghettos out of touch with the natural world.

“The Hasidic Jews, who more than any other group cling to this European Jewish ghetto culture of centuries past, are like the Amish in many respects, yet a people more cut off from nature and the natural world cannot be imagined. When one thinks of Jews one thinks of merchants, financiers, shopkeepers, peddlers, professional people, artists, intellectuals, and craftsmen; one does not usually think of farmers, fishermen, or naturalists although, of course, there have been exceptions.”

However, Ehrenfeld and Bentley have been rather superficial or one-sided in their judgment of Hasidism. Lamm points out that it was the ‘mitnaggedim’, opponents of Hasidism, who had no relationship with nature, while Hasidism tells man to respect nature.

In his evaluation of the question of whether man is an animal, Israeli philosopher Joseph Agassi carries out a mocking intellectual
exercise. He contrasts the motif of the non-Jew at ease in nature with that of the Jew ‘lost in the wilderness’, speculating on the imaginary attitudes of Konrad Lorenz and Sigmund Freud.\footnote{172}

Basing his position on the ideas of Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch, Yehudah Levi states that Halakha prevents a city’s unchecked expansion which can damage quality of life. He refers to the obligatory ‘green belt’ around the walled city that the Torah prescribed for the Levites. The laws of this belt “completely eliminate the possibility of the unchecked expansion of these cities, and thus, the formation of the monstrosity known as megalopolis.” \footnote{173}

These above observations must be seen in the context of the specific history of the Jewish people and their perception of their surroundings. While the Zionist movement brought a more recent perspective to the issue, the roots of such views go back several millennia.

\section*{Conclusions}

Despite the limited number of publications available on the subject of Judaism and environmentalism, they raise many motifs and themes. Together, these articles provide neither a balanced nor an integrated view of the subject. What emerges is a patchy understanding of the field, and an indication that there are many directions to be taken and much material for major scholarly work to be done.

Analysis of the secondary material, however, can provide much more than stimuli for further research in the field. An assessment of modern publications not only identifies a significant number of classical sources, but also hints at how many more insights may yet be obtained by analysis of the large body of classical Jewish literature. This will be referred to in the final chapter of this study.

Few Jewish writers have published work on the subject. For most of them, these were incidental forays into a largely alien field. One has to conclude that those who are scholars of Judaism, with interests elsewhere, do not wish to invest the effort necessary to obtain a structured view on the multifaceted, complex and confused world of environmentalism.

\section*{Selective arguments}

To analyze Jewish attitudes to the environment in a more detailed way, a profound understanding of environmentalism is needed. As this is usually lacking, Jewish writers address the issue by bringing to it selective arguments only. In view of the variety of themes raised and the arguments used, however, one can conclude that within
Jewish classical sources there is a significant number of issues that are relevant to the subject of the environment.

The issues which have received attention in the modern publications at hand do not cover all the important aspects of the environmental discourse. No writer attempts to integrate all issues. We are almost at the beginning of the scholarly work in this field, even if more than 25 years have elapsed since the first Jewish articles on the subject were published.

Few specific issues have been addressed in detail. J. Cohen’s book on Genesis 1:28 is one exception. Benstein’s article on the text referring to learning and nature admiration from Mishnah Avot is another. Schwartz perhaps goes farthest in the field by reviewing the spoliation of nature debate, and discussing how classical Jewish sources have interpreted two of the most often quoted ‘environmental’ principles in the Bible.

A common base

The publications reviewed reveal a diversity of religious Jewish backgrounds, from Orthodox to Reconstructionist. There is a great gap between the extremes with regard to their views on the destruction of the ecosystem. There are vast differences in their attitudes toward nature. Is there anything, then, which all the Jewish writers do have in common in their attitudes toward environmentalism?

The answer is that there is some common ground. Despite all these divergences, there are limits which Jewish writers rarely exceed. Biocentricity as a Jewish concept seems so indefensible that, with the one exception of Troster, no other Jewish writer even approaches it. Wyschogrod’s ambivalence and Waskow’s activism, in search of “empathy for Mother Earth”, both stop far short of declaring nature holy.

Well before modern environmentalism entered the mainstream of Western thought, Abraham J. Heschel, Professor of Ethics and Mysticism at the Jewish Theological Seminary, calibrated the Jewish attitude to nature writing: “One of the great achievements of the prophets was the repudiation of nature as an object of adoration. They tried to teach us that neither nature’s beauty nor grandeur, neither power nor the state, neither money nor things of space are worthy of our supreme adoration, love, sacrifice, or self-dedication. Yet the desanctification of nature did not in any way bring about an alienation of nature. It brought man together with all things in a fellowship of praise. The Biblical man could say that he was ‘in league with the stones of the field’ (Job 5:23).”

One can imagine some Jewish environmentalist writers cringing at several aspects of Heschel’s statement. There is nothing in their
writing, however, to indicate that any of them would dare postulate that Jews should sanctify nature. Even Troster avoids saying that.  

**A nucleus of common ground**

However diverse the Jewish writers’ views may be, there seems to be a nucleus of common ground that a number of important environmental considerations and commandments already appear in the Bible, and are part of the Jewish heritage. No writer sides with Lynn White’s accusations to see in the Bible a legitimization for nature’s destruction.

The furthest Jewish writers go is to consider that the socio-economic conditions of Jews in certain areas in recent centuries may have made nature apparently irrelevant to them. The playing field of Jewish thought on environmentalism may be wide, but it has distinct boundaries. Both biocentricty and caring so little about nature as to destroy it for the pleasure of destruction are beyond the pale of almost everybody.

**Being influenced by fashion**

Quite a few modern Jewish writers have been influenced by the fashionable aspect of environmentalism, against which some others have issued warnings. When reading the classical material, it is often said that the positive Jewish attitude toward protection of nature and resources has as its main goal maintaining them for man rather than being an absolute, abstract concept.

For apologetic reasons, when discussing the current subject, several Jewish writers have often made eclectic use of quotations from classical Jewish sources. One of the publications which goes furthest in this is *To Till and To Tend*.  

It should come as no surprise that this is a publication for Jewish environmental advocacy. If the writers do not sufficiently qualify the emphasis laid in these texts, the erroneous impression may be given that Judaism is in some way a precursor of modern environmentalism.

**Eliminating apologetics**

Developing a strategic Jewish environmental perspective on the current subject, combined with an understanding of modern environmentalism, is more appropriate than apologetics. Rather than choosing from the many traditional sources those which suits one’s cause, one can gradually develop in increasing detail a coherent Jewish view on the subject. Modern environmentalism’s achievements and flaws may then be looked at from the viewpoint of an ancient and consolidated value system.
When reviewing the modern Jewish literature on Judaism and environmentalism, one finds that several writers wish to reconcile Judaism with ideological environmentalism, and make great efforts to find a common denominator in the two approaches. One may wonder whether, in today’s fragmented world, there is a genuine Jewish need for such a reconciliation, or whether this is an expression of the personal needs of some Jewish individuals.

The current study shows the need for in-depth analysis of the development of Jewish thought on the subject over the past decades. As almost all writers only express themselves once, or – at most – a few times, on Jewish attitudes toward environmentalism, there is no ongoing thought process to study. To go even a little further: among the writers analyzed, most probably only a few very environmentally-committed ones have thought about the issue on an ongoing basis.

The limited interest of Orthodox Jewry

Several Orthodox writers have taken part in the debate in the past decades, although their voice has not been very strong.\(^{181,182}\) Why is it that so few Orthodox thinkers have studied environmentalist literature in a limited way, rather than systematically examining a powerful movement which occupies such a central place in public interest?

The Israeli religious parties also show an extremely scant interest in environmental issues, even compared to that of several other Israeli parties. (Contrary to the situation in many Western countries, Israeli political platforms do not consider the environment a priority issue.)

There are several possible reasons for this lack of attention. Orthodox Jews do not primarily associate ‘Jewish environmental laws’ with environmentalism, but rather with religion. These are seen within the concept of God’s giving the land of Israel to the Jews and setting the rules.

Furthermore, Orthodoxy is not very outward looking, and thus the problem is not high on its list of priorities. Also, considerable study is needed in order to reach a sound understanding of the confused and fragmented character of modern environmentalism. It is difficult to imagine this featuring centrally on the study agenda of Orthodox Jews, whose focus is on understanding Jewish teachings.

Another cogent reason may also be that large sectors of Orthodoxy are usually reluctant to deal with modern currents of thought and the abstract aspects of ideologies. This is partly because so many modern currents of thought turn out to be passing fads. Orthodox
Jewry claims to represent eternal values. These are challenged in a different way by the Zeitgeist in each generation. Often it is only when Orthodox Jewry is directly attacked and its basic values or rituals questioned that a position is defined and expressed.

Another factor worth mentioning in this context is that Orthodoxy often hesitates to associate Halakha with usefulness. This is true for environmental matters and others such as certain hygienic aspects of the dietary laws.

**Organized Jewish activism**

Whatever one's position may be on the ideological issues, the practical tensions between modern environmentalism and Judaism are very weak. Thus there is little need for Jews to interact with environmentalism. This lack of specific challenge confirms the situation that, for the worldwide Jewish community, environmentalism seems to be a problem of society in general, with only marginal aspects of specifically Jewish import.

The organized groups of Jewish activists who attempt to raise community interest in environmental issues are small and relatively isolated. They are unlikely to be able as yet to bring environmental issues to the forefront of the Jewish agenda.

There is little reason why the Jewish community in general would change its attitude toward Jewish environmentalist activism in the near future. It is probable that environmentalism will continue to permeate society at the level of practical activity. The more it becomes institutionalized, the less need there will be for specifically Jewish roles.

**Jewish political aspects**

However, the Jewish polity cannot ignore the debate on environmental issues. Relatively little attention is given to this issue in modern Jewish publications. It is in the political interest of Judaism to make its voice heard in major national and international discussions concerning matters on which the Jewish tradition has much to say. The alternative, remaining silent, fosters the perception that this is not so; unfortunately, silence is all too often the case. In order to be able to take positions, familiarity with the interaction of Judaism and environmentalism is necessary. This should provide a stimulus for further research in the field.

Another political consideration is that certain environmental policies are relevant to the Jewish people. Developments derived from the global warming debate will impact on world energy demand in the next century, and in turn on the economic position of several of Israel's oil- and gas-producing enemies.
Jewish concern for environmental matters will have to find its main expression in Jewish participation in the actions of society in general, taking a more responsible attitude toward the environment. To the extent that environmental issues have specific Jewish aspects, these will have to be dealt with mainly in the domain of the religious and scholarly world.

Over the past decades, Israel has become in many ways the dominant force within Judaism. This is so even if, at present, and particularly in the United States, several Jewish Diaspora leaders are attempting to make their communities less Israel-centered. The fact that Israel is not very advanced in its environmental policies means that there is little – if any – initiative there to inspire the Diaspora for specific action in this field. Nor is there an external incentive to do so.

The touching points of Judaism with modern environmentalism can also be seen within a broader framework. Through analysis, one not only learns about the issues concerned, but one can also gain perspective on a variety of indirectly related subjects. These include: the nature of the environmentalist debate, the *modus operandi* of contemporary Judaism and how modern society functions.

**The lack of balance**

Though the number of modern Jewish publications on the subject of this study is small, some conclusions can be drawn as to its focus. The one theme which recurs in most of the articles is the relevance of classical Jewish sources to contemporary environmental issues. This approach fits what seem to be the two major motives for writings in the field: the need to react to environmentalist criticism of Judaism and the Jewish environmentalist conviction that the Jewish community should be active in the environmental field.

This may also explain why there is little Jewish interest in other issues such as the relationship between environmentalism and paganism or Nazism.\(^{183}\) It does not fit the two motivations mentioned and is thus largely left to others to study.
Notes for Chapter Two

1 The name Rambi is an abbreviation of Reshimat Ma'amirim leMadda' e baYahadut. Hebrew.
2 This also emerged from the discussion at the Conference on Judaism and the Natural World, Harvard University Center for the Study of World Religions, February 22–24, 1998.
3 Genesis 1:28.
5 Ibid.
6 Arnold Toynbee, International Journal of Environmental Studies, 1971, as quoted in Jeremy Cohen, On Classical Judaism and Environmental Crisis, Tikkun, Vol. 5 No. 2, 1990, p. 74. Cohen adds that cultural geographer Clarence J. Glacken saw "the idea of man against nature in western thought" as a derivative of Genesis cosmogony; and landscape architect Ian L. McHarg "denounced the divine injunction with greater severity still", as it provided the sanction to conquer nature and threaten God.
8 Ibid., p. 204.
10 Ibid.
12 Historian Elspeth Whitney writes: "Over the past 25 years, White's challenge to religion to produce a more environmentally sensitive theology has generated a vast body of material both critiquing and defending the ecological stance of the Judeo-Christian tradition. White's ideas have been a crucial element in what Roderick Nash has called the 'greening' of American religion... Almost immediately after its publication, 'Roots' became a standard feature of anthologies and textbooks for its use in college courses in environmental studies, the history of technology, and science, society, and technology... The great historian Arnold Toynbee paid White the ultimate compliment by appropriating his argument twice without acknowledgment. In 1972 Senator Alan Cranston quoted Lynn White to Congress and in 1980 the Vatican made St. Francis the official patron saint of the ecologists. Reprints of the article also appeared in numerous publications directed towards the general public ranging from The Boy Scout Handbook and The Sierra Club Bulletin to The Whole Earth Catalogue and The Environmental Handbook and from the hippie newsletter, The Oracle, to the more staid Horizon Magazine. In 1970 both Time magazine and The New York Times featured reprisals of White's essays... Overall the thesis in 'Roots' has been repeated, reprised and criticized in over two hundred books and articles by historians, environmentalists and philosophers of technology between 1967 and the present, and its central ideas have become so embedded in the ongoing discussions of the cultural context of environmental issues that they have been described as part of environmental 'folklore'." Elspeth Whitney, Lynn White, Ecotheology, and History. Environmental Ethics, Summer, 1993, pp. 151–169.


17 Robert Gordis, of the Jewish Theological Seminary, was one of the first Jewish thinkers to address the environmental issue for this reason, writing on Judaism and the spoliation of nature in 1971. Judaism and the Spoliation of Nature. *Congress Biweekly*, April 2, 1971, pp. 9–12. In a 1976 article, he pondered, “What is it about the Bible that makes it a fair game for hunting at all times and seasons? It is a sport popular with conservatives, liberals, and radicals alike... All honor to the ecologists and the liberationists! But why distort the content and the spirit of the Bible, which still remains the great charter of human dignity and liberty. As an ancient Sage said, 'Into the well from which you drink, do not cast stones.'” *The Bible As Whipping-Boy*. *Midstream*, October, 1976, pp. 43, 46. When he returned to the subject in 1986, he explained why it should be of interest to explore the insights and attitudes on ecology in the biblical and post-biblical tradition. One reason was the importance of the issues involved in the ecological threat – contamination and pollution; another was the misunderstanding of the Jewish teachings in this field. Robert Gordis, Judaic Ethics For a Lawless World. New York: The Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1986, p. 113.

18 Eric G. Freudenstein, also writing early on the subject, considers that the conditions exist today for a more active Jewish role in society, including involvement in the environment. This is in contrast to the past: “In modern times, the active participation of Jews in the Diaspora, in all phases of the public welfare, the reclamation of the land in the State of Israel and a general awareness of the problems of ecology, have created a new climate for a deeper understanding and acceptance of the concern for the environment evinced by the Jewish tradition. Conditions are now propitious for the ancient Jewish message of bal tashchit to be once again proclaimed loud and clear to all men of goodwill.” *Ecology and the Jewish Tradition*. *Judaism*, Vol. 19 No. 4, Fall, 1970, p. 414.


20 In 1996, Lamm confirmed once again his stand from the early 1970s, and declared that Judaism must relate to the ecological crisis: “It is widely accepted - ever since Rachel Carson’s Silent Spring - that there is indeed a very real problem that must be attended to.” Norman Lamm, A Jewish View of the Environment and Ecology. Lecture given at the Technion, Haifa, Israel, October 7, 1996.


22 Lamm, Technion lecture, op. cit.

23 Ibid.


27 Everett Gendler recalls his enjoyment of nature in the city of his birth, Chariton, Iowa and during his adolescence in Des Moines, even though "in retrospect... [only] until after ordination from seminary and a period of time spent in the valley of Mexico did nature as such come more fully to my awareness. The realization of this awareness took time, its relation to my religious outlook more time still... From this, then, the re-evaluation of official Judaism, and the pained perception of its present plight: sea-sited synagogues with sea-views bricked over! tree-filled lots with windowless sanctuaries! hill-placed chapels opaque to sunsets! the astonishing indifference to natural surroundings!" Gendler then asks, "Was Judaism always this way? I very much doubt it." Everett Gendler, On the Judaism of Nature. In: James A. Sleeper & Alan L. Mintz, eds., The New Jews. New York: Vintage Books, 1971, pp. 233-234.

28 "In graduate school, studying the roots of our environmental crisis, I saw many allegations stating that the Bible implies human beings were meant to dominate and exploit the earth, that, in fact, all of creation was intended for human use. This anthropocentric perspective, whether rooted in Judaism or not, has been a pervasive, insidious problem; it probably is at the heart of our environmental crisis. While the role of the 'Judeo-Christian' tradition (a phrase that continues to trouble me) was being debated in my academic circles, I was looking at the world around me. My Jewish friends found my choice of profession interesting and curious. What I found curious was the lack of debate about environmental issues in the Jewish community, the apparent lack of commitment (and accompanying responsibility) toward causes that were not specifically Jewish, the lack of concern for the capacity of the world to continue to sustain and nourish us, and the small number of Jews professionally involved in the environment. All environmental problems are human problems. And I have always felt that human problems are Jewish problems because of our tradition's mandate for social justice, and the Jewish belief in the ability of human beings to improve themselves and to create a better world... "I began to search for connections between my Judaism and my environmentalism, casually at first. Over the past ten years, my search has been more systematic. I began to do for environmental matters what Jews customarily do for all kinds of issues - look to our traditions. Looking with an 'environmental' eye, I found - as I might have expected - laws, precepts, rules and regulations, recommendations and precedents in the Torah and commentaries which tell us how to take care of the earth. They speak of attitudes and obligations toward the land and toward other living beings; they delineate our responsibility to care for the earth which sustains us, and our obligation to be involved in the ongoing work of creation. I have been finding in the tapestry of Judaism significant strands which were woven together in ages past and which somehow have become unravelled in our lives." Miriam Wyman, Derekh Eretz: A Personal Exploration. Conservative Judaism, Fall, 1991, pp. 5-6.


30 Elsewhere, Bernstein writes: "I have always been enchanted by place - by all kinds of places. My greatest pleasures come from exploring different environments. Gardens, overgrown corner lots, cemeteries, polluted rivers, and old, abandoned mills all find their way into my heart. "So it is no surprise that when I first began to explore the bible for a spiritual direction, it was the places in it that spoke to me: the Garden of Eden, the Red Sea, the Sinai, the Jordan River, the Temple on Mount Zion, the waters of Babylon." Ellen Bernstein, ed., Ecology & the Jewish Spirit: Where Nature and the Sacred Meet. Woodstock, Vermont: Jewish Lights Publishing, 1998, p. 17.
A revealing comment on the need of certain Jewish currents always to be politically correct is made in the biographical note on Philip J. Bentley. “He has been a Jewish environmentalist for so long that when he first raised the subject in rabbinical school, he was told, ‘The environment? That’s just a distraction from the real issue – Vietnam.’” Ibid., p. 269.

Helfand issues a warning which further explains his motives for reacting to this subject: “When dealing with a current topic such as ecology, one must be particularly careful to resist the temptation to jump hastily on the bandwagon with a ‘trendy’ interpretation or presentation of alleged Jewish thought, simply for the sake of being ‘au courant’. The principal victims of such superficial me-tooism are the Jewish tradition which it purports to represent and the halacha-conscious Jew who is genuinely concerned with that tradition. When faced with a steady stream of assorted homilies and shallow analyses on ‘timely topics’, the halacha-conscious Jew is repelled.” Helfand, op. cit., pp. 330-331.

“Twenty years ago this spring, I worked as a high-school intern in the national offices of a Jewish youth organization. My job involved the preparation of study material on the subject of Judaism and ecology. As politicians, theologians, students, writers, and others were hastening to identify with environmental concern in general and with the ecology movement in particular, we felt that we too had to take a stand. Judaism, we presumed, had to address the fundamental questions of ecology; and, more importantly, it had to prove compatible with the correct, desired answers (just as it had to guide us properly with regard to the war in Vietnam and the civil rights movement).” Cohen then refers to the “harsh and popular indictment of Judaism’s biblical foundations, which were blamed for our typically Western exploitative attitude to nature” and states that he felt that there was a Jewish answer to the accusations: “Surely, we believed, along with numerous theologians who took up the cause of the Bible, surely Judaism could not have abandoned the environment and its advocates in our hour of collective need. It was inconceivable that biblical and rabbinic literature could have left us disarmed and alienated as the decade of the sixties gave way, at times painfully, to that of the 70s.” J. Cohen, op. cit., p. 74.

“The environmentalist movement, like all other high-minded and serious efforts to improve the lot of mankind or the world as such, tends to become overly fashionable, and falls into the hands of moralizers and cause-seekers who do not fear exaggeration or one-sidedness. As a result, there is developing a reaction against the alleged excesses of the movement...” Lamm, Technion lecture, op. cit.


In the public discussion at the 1998 Harvard Conference on Judaism and the Natural World, Daniel Swartz, Associate Director of the National Religious Partnership for the Environment, mentioned that, from his personal experience, the issue of Jewish environmentalism has raised general interest in Judaism in Jews who are otherwise remote from the tradition.

Weintraub asks: “Are highly processed or refined foods kosher? Can we, for example, label as kosher the tomato sauce that our children eat in school cafeterias, even if it contains no meat or lard, when, as one study recently found, the actual vegetable content of some sauces is as low as eight percent? Further, since kasbrut is concerned
with the purity of our food production, as well as consumption, these classes should consider the social and natural contexts of our food manufacture. Should a Jew eat lettuce picked by California migrant workers with canisters of toxic organophosphates strung from their shoulders? We should at the very least question the kashrut of food that is the product of child or other oppressed labor, or the cause of natural perdition, as is much cash-cropping and cattle overgrazing. Nor would this concern be new to Jewish tradition, which has since the writing of Leviticus forbidden the enjoyment of the fruits of oppression.” Samuel H. Weintraub, The Spiritual Ecology of Kashrut. In: To Till and To Tend, op. cit., p. 24. Reprinted from The Reconstructionist, Winter 1991/1992, pp. 12–14.

Lerner quotes Rabbi Zalman Schachter-Shalomi’s suggestion that “we should add a new code of eco-kosher practices to our practice of kashrut. Products that are grown using earth-destroying pesticides may not be eco-kosher. Newsprint made by chopping down an ancient and irreplaceable forest may not be eco-kosher. Products that are made out of irreplaceable natural resources may not be eco-kosher. Institutions that pollute the environment or use excessive amounts of fuel may not be eco-kosher. Investments in companies that pollute the environment or are otherwise ecologically insensitive may not be eco-kosher.” Michael Lerner, Jewish Renewal: A Path to Healing and Transformation. New York: Grosset/Putnam, 1994, p. 336.

43 Ibid.
44 Deuteronomy 20:19.
46 Helfand, op. cit., p. 335.
47 Freudenstein, op. cit., p. 411.
48 Shapiro, op. cit., p. 28.

50 Ibid.
52 Leviticus 19:18.
56 This idea originates in a baraita: “Man should always consider himself to be half guilty and half innocent. When he follows a commandment he is fortunate to have put himself on the side of being innocent. If he committed a transgression it is bad that he has put himself on the side of guilt. R. Elazar son of R. Simon says that this applies to the world as a whole.” Bavli Kiddushin 40b.
59 Branover sees three components here, the first one being that “damaging the environment transgresses the Divine Plan”. In his opinion, “from a religious perspective,
harming the environment is worse than inconveniencing or endangering other mem-
bers of society because it spoils G-d's creation. Thirdly, we can extract valuable
knowledge from how traditional religious education engenders moral and ethical values
in the personality of the individual. This knowledge could be an incomparable aid
to those who wish to design and enact a system of true ecological education." Herman
Branover, Towards Environmental Consciousness. B’Or haTorah. No. 10, 1997–1998,

60 Mordechai Liebling, Choose Life – and Protect It. The Reconstructionist, March-April
1990, pp. 7–8.

61 Ibid.

62 “Why would these disaffected Jews be interested? More and more Jews, mostly younger,
are putting more and more thought and energy into protecting the environment. The
young, especially, are worried that current air and water pollution may dose them with
cancer 15 or 20 years from now, that depletion of the ozone layer may shatter the food
chain in ways that may take decades to emerge and will be catastrophic in effect, that
global warming may happen inch by inch and in their lifetimes will drown the great
seaports and scorch the Great Plains mile by mile.

“Most Jews who feel this way find secular organizations and non-Jewish religious commu-
nities convenient frameworks for their action. When they join such groups to 'save the
earth', willy-nilly they withdraw their energy from Jewish life. How can we engage the
desire and action of Jews to avert world environmental disaster in a way that would
strengthen the Jewish community rather than divert energy from it?” Arthur Waskow,

63 Liebling, op. cit.

64 Ibid., p. 8.

65 Ibid., p. 52.


68 “Humanity is at a crossroads – on the one hand there is a road which leads to annihilation
and obliteration, and the other leads us back to the Garden of Eden. Each of us must
choose in which direction he wishes to travel.” Adam Jackson, Returning to Eden: Judaism

69 Ibid.

70 Eric Katz, Nature’s Healing Power, the Holocaust, and the Environmental Crisis. Judaism,
Winter 1997, pp. 79–89.

71 Ibid., p. 82.

72 Ibid.

73 Freudenstein, op. cit., p. 413.

74 Ibid. Freudenstein adds: “One observation however, may be in order. Franz Oppenheimer,
the social scientist, once remarked that it is not important for history to record who said something first, but rather who said something first in such a way that
the world paid attention. Ancient Jewish tradition stressed the maintenance of the
biosphere over three and one half thousand years ago, but during the centuries of the
Diaspora, divorced from the land, the message of our venerable tradition became weak…
Nor was the destruction of the world’s natural assets as yet a threat to human existence.”
Ibid.


76 See Bavli Yebamot 65b.


78 Ibid.


82 1195–1270.


84 Rakover op. cit., p. 18.


87 J. Cohen, op. cit., p. 75.


90 Ibid., p. 75.

91 J. Cohen, Be Fertile and Increase, op. cit., p. 6.

92 In the 1930s, when people were less aware of technology’s ambiguities, Benno Jacob, a German rabbi, interpreted the term ‘conquer’ to mean ‘trampling’, i.e., that man had been given unlimited dominion over the earth. “Thus no activity, including making holes or digging down mountains, drying out or diversion of rivers can be considered a God-adverse violation. Man can only sin by immoral acts on the earth by which he desecrates her and which she senses.” Benno Jacob, *Das Erste Buch der Tora Genesis: Übersetzt und Erklärt*. Berlin: Schocken Verlag, 1934, p. 61. German.

93 Well before Toynbee’s attacks on perceived Jewish attitudes toward population control, Israeli historian Chaim Hillel Ben Sasson had said of Toynbee’s work: “When I started to read Toynbee, I noticed his hatred against the survival of Judaism. I think that he is one of our greatest ideological enemies.” Ben Sasson says that, while Christianity is a synthesis of Greek and Jewish thinking, Toynbee wants to remove the Jewish element from Christianity and instead of it, bring in an element from the Far East. On the one hand, he is very Christian, on the other – he is very anti-Jewish. He would prefer a kind of marriage of Christianity and Buddhism. The difficulty with him is that he is never totally incorrect in what he says. Like an impressionist painter, he puts the wrong emphasis. For a certain percentage, all of it is true.” Manfred Gerstenfeld, Interview with Chaim Hillel Ben Sasson. *Nieuw Israelietisch Weekblad*, May 17, 1963. Dutch.


97 Ibid., pp. 42–3.


100 Gordis, Judaism and the Spoliation of Nature, op. cit., p. 9, quoting Mishnah *Yebamot* 66:5; Shulhan Arukh *Yoreh Deah* 1:5.
However, one should not ignore that, today, some sectors of the Jewish community and environmentalism do have different views on the 'be fruitful and multiply' issue. For the Orthodox, having many children is considered positive, an attitude with roots in the mass murder of Jews during the Holocaust. Environmentalism and part of the Jewish people may be on opposing ends of the argument here. Those who talk so much about ethics, however, cannot expect the Jewish people to give major consideration to the views of parts of the very Western society whose leaders — only a few decades ago — actively destroyed the Jews, assisted in the process, or passively observed it.

102 Dresner & Sherwin, op. cit., p. 138.
103 Ibid.
105 Ibid., p. 151.
106 Ibid.
107 Ibid.
109 Ibid., p. 121.
111 Ibid., p. 17.
112 Ibid., p. 20.
113 Troster states that Jews ought to think of God as both being and becoming a panentheistic deity. He writes, "Panentheism assumes that the universe and everything in it is part of God, and that God is also more than the universe... Gaia is part of God, but not all of God. Therefore, the immanence of God is displayed in all of nature... and we are part of Gaia and thus part of God. But God is more than nature, and also stands outside of nature as Creator. We are bound to this nature and bound to the laws of nature and Gaia, but we are also the 'brain cells' of Gaia. And as the zelem (image) of God, we have the mandate for the cognitive anticipation of Gaia's needs, which are ultimately our own needs." Ibid., p. 24.
115 Ibid., p. 2. In another article, Schwartz wishes to foster a dialog from within Jewish tradition, which may lead "to a reawakening of the natural world as a central category in our Jewish understanding of what we mean by both the human and the Divine." He hopes to influence the direction of future writing in this field by pointing to issues that need further investigation: "My not-so-hidden agenda is to reassert the Jewish perspective in the encounter between Judaism and the environment, with the conviction that a Jewish contribution to the growing debate on environmental ethics can only come from a response strongly rooted in all the ambivalence and ambiguities of the Jewish relationship to the natural world. Perhaps even more importantly, I believe that the reevaluation by the environmental movement of our modern cultural relationship to the natural world, which challenges some of the basic values of our modern culture, deeply confronts ingrained trends in Jewish thought, as well." Eilon Schwartz, Judaism and Nature: Theological and Moral Issues to Consider While Renegotiating a Jewish Relationship to the Natural World. Judaism, Vol. 44 No. 4, Fall, 1995, p. 438.
116 "We need to devote ourselves to the elimination of material excess in our lives, in our homes, in our offices, in what we eat and in the technology which we utilize so wastefully. Even our waste is wastefully disposed of. Only such reorientation, in which material excess is replaced with deep spiritual awareness of the ultimate partnership between humanity and the earth in the achievement of God's goals, can lay the
foundation for a new and more healthy relationship between us and our environment.”
Berman, op. cit., p. 4.


119 Ibid., p. 21.

120 Ibid.

121 Ibid.

122 Ibid.


124 Robert Pois argues that both Judaism and Christianity are based on the premise that “being made in the image of the divine, humans must be seen as being ontologically superior to nature” and that, according to Nazism, any anthropocentric views must be rejected. Pois notes that Hitler emphasized the importance of recognizing nature’s power over man, and declared in a recorded conversation: “At the end of the last century the progress of science and technique led liberalism astray into proclaiming man’s mastery over nature and announcing that he would soon have dominion over space. But a simple storm is enough – and everything collapses like a pack of cards.” Pois adds: “Hitler sounded remarkably like contemporary environmentalists who, with ample reason, proclaim that a sharp-tempered Mother Nature, weary of pitiful man’s toying with her inflexible laws, will eventually avenge herself upon those who, at least since the onset of industrialization, have tried her patience.” Robert Pois, National Socialism and the Religion of Nature. London: Croom Helm, 1986, pp. 37, 42. Pois continues, “The responsibilities inherent in [man’s] so elevated but uncomfortable a position, i.e., ensconced somewhere between the natural world and the Kingdom of God must be great indeed and, as is to be expected, humans have rebelled against this demanding role. Indeed, according to some observers, such neo-pagan revivals as the search for Aryan roots and, most importantly, National Socialism, can be viewed as being in large measure rebellions of this nature.” Ibid., p. 37.

125 This argument is developed by the French philosopher Luc Ferry, who contrasts the Nazis’ love of animals and nature with their hatred of certain humans. He writes “There is nothing accidental in the fact that we owe to the Nazi regime until today the two most elaborate types of legislation which humanity has known on the subject of the protection of nature and animals.” This is a reference to the Tierverschutzgesetz – the law for the protection of animals – of 1933, the Reichsjagdgesetz (the Reich’s Game Law), which limits hunting, of 1934 and the “monument of modern ecology, which is the law on the protection of nature (Reichsnaturschutzgesetz).” Ferry draws attention to the strange fact that one finds no mention of these laws in contemporary environmental literature – other than some marginal observations by opponents of the Greens: these laws were the first in the world “to reconcile a sizable ecological project with the desire for a real political intervention.” Luc Ferry, Le nouvel ordre écologique. Paris: Grasset, 1992, p. 54. French.


“Listen to Hitler and his men speaking. Listen how Hess’s deputy affirms that Germany only wants to obey the laws of nature. Listen how Hitler makes himself tender toward the animals which he declares his brothers, listen how he says to Raushning that nature is cruel and that we have to be cruel like it. Listen how he says again to this Raushning, textually, that the Jew is much farther removed from the animal than the Aryan, that the Jew is a stranger in the natural order, that the Jew is a being outside nature. ‘Oh how much the enemy knows his enemy!’ ” Albert Cohen, *Carnets* 1978. Paris: Gallimard, 1979, p. 136. French.

Wyschogrod, op. cit.

Wyschogrod adds: “For Nietzsche – for whom Christianity was just a form of Judaism, perhaps even a degenerate one – Jewish morality was a slave morality and thus anti-evolutionary. Evolutionary morality is the right of the stronger to destroy the weaker. Nature wants the weak to perish. The weak contribute to the march of evolution by perishing; and when they refuse to perish, then the weaker have triumphed over the stronger. This is the reversal of evolution and it occurs through slave morality, which is the brainwashing of the strong by the weak in order to inhibit them from exercising their strength... The weak invent biblical prophetic morality which speaks about protecting the widow and the orphan, the poor, the disadvantaged, all those who cannot care for themselves. Evolution is thus stopped in its tracks and the weak proliferate.” Ibid.

Ibid.


Gillis, op. cit.

Ibid.

This became particularly clear at the time of German unification. Official Israeli reactions were very negative. Prime Minister Shamir said, “A strong and united Germany may perhaps try again to destroy the Jewish People.” Industry Minister Ariel Sharon said, “A united Germany embodies for the free world in general, and for Jews in particular, major dangers. We should not forget what the Germans did to us while they were united.” Michael Wolffsohn, In: Gunter Trautmann, *Die Haesslichen Deutschen?* Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1991, p. 76. German.

This issue is discussed by both Elisabeth Badinter and Anna Bramwell. French philosopher and writer Badinter sees a reaction to Nazi Germany in some attitudes displayed by the German Greens: “The slogan of the German Greens ‘better red than dead’ which was so fashionable in the years 1970–1980 can only be explained by the antecedents of those... who exclaimed it. Children or grandchildren of hangmen they were more than anything afraid of repeating the mistakes of their fathers.” Elisabeth Badinter, *XY de L’identité Masculine.* Paris: Odile Jacob, 1992, p. 228. French.

Bramwell points out that a Freudian psychiatrist, Jannine Chasseguet-Smirgel, “accused the Greens of wanting to write out of history the Nazi murders of the Jews; and claimed that Green interest in air pollution was a subconscious reference to the gassing of the Jews, and that they claimed that Germans were in danger of suffocation through air pollution in order to hide their feelings of guilt... at having gassed the Jews.” Bramwell, op. cit., p. 224, citing Jannine Chasseguet-Smirgel’s paper to the Institute of Contemporary Arts, The Green Theatre, 1986, pp. 10–11, 21–24, 27. Bramwell states that Chasseguet-Smirgel “interprets the German ecological movement, especially the anti-nuclear stance, as a subconscious attempt to pretend that Germans can be victims as well as villains.” Bramwell, op. cit., p. 273.

Bramwell adds her own interpretation: “Whatever one may think of the idea that subconscious guilt feelings can be passed down through the generations – via the blood,
the genes or the collective subconscious is not explained — it is plain that by some Greens are seen as in danger of breaching one of the main conventions of Western democracy since the war, the centrality of the Jewish experience under the Nazis. This is not because there is actual anti-Semitism among the Greens, or support for Nazi crimes such as Auschwitz, but because they implicitly turn their backs on so many of the old Enlightenment ideas: progress, emancipation, growth and utilitarianism." Ibid., p. 224.

138 From communication with former Israeli diplomats.

139 Anti-Zionism includes the extremists’ position that the Jews do not have a right to their own state as well as the attitude of those who require from Israel a behavior which is not required from other nations.

140 Many proofs have been offered for this in a multitude of publications in the last decades. So the Dutch writer Philo Bregstein concludes an essay on anti-Semitism in its contemporary variations by stating as one of its main conclusions: “Anti-Zionism is often in all its ambivalent shades, as Jean Amery already wrote in 1969, ‘the salon-fit expression of an honorable post-War anti-Semitism.’” Philo Bregstein, Het kromme kan toch niet recht zijn. Baarn: de Prom, 1996, p. 78. Dutch. The argument is well summarized by Dan Segre, political scientist and former Israeli diplomat, who states that the “central thread running through European attitudes toward Jews – and towards Israel – consists of long-held historical prejudices, complexes and frustrations. ‘Anti-Semitism has not disappeared… On the contrary… it has been broadened to include anti-Zionism.” Interview with Dan Segre. In: Manfred Gerstenfeld, Israel’s New Future: Interviews. Jerusalem: Rubin Mass & the Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs, 1994, p. 60.


142 James Jasper and Dorothy Nelkin write that, perhaps due to the large number of Jews in both the sciences and fur industry, “Jewish researchers receive explicit hate mail”. The authors give the following example: “An anonymous letter to the President of U.S. Surgical reads: ‘How dare you filthy Jews steal innocent animals to torture and slaughter to look for means to make more filthy money? It’s a shame Hitler did not exterminate each one of you. You’re not even human.” James M. Jasper & Dorothy Nelkin, The Animal Rights Crusade: The Growth of a Moral Protest. New York: The Free Press, 1992, p. 49.

143 Zvi Shinover & Yitzchak Goldberg, Quality of Life and the Environment in Jewish Sources. Nachalim, Israel: Mofet, 1994, p. 60. Hebrew.

144 Ibid., p. 64.

145 Wyschogrod, op. cit.

146 Wyschogrod adds: “Maybe it is because I have been involved in too much dialogue in recent years, not with the priests [of] Baal and Ashteret, but, some might say, with priests who are not so different from the priests... [of] Baal and Ashteret. Perhaps it would have been better if the prophets had occasionally sat down with them and said, “Tell us how you see the world.” Could there be some insights in what they taught which we need to learn? I am convinced there were; and even if we don’t agree with much of what they believed, I think we would profit by better understanding their point of view.” Ibid.

147 Luc Ferry claims that, for both Judaism and critical philosophy, man is ‘anti-nature’. He views this positively: “Man is the anti-nature being and as such the being in favor of the Law. It seems to me that Levinas perceived this very well in the following
sentences in his book *Difficile liberté*. The Jew discovers man before he discovers the landscapes and the towns. He is at home in society before being so in a house. He understands the world starting from the other person, rather than from the totality of being starting from the earth... This freedom has nothing sickly, nothing cramped, nothing torn. It puts in the second place the values of being rooted and institutes other forms of reliability and responsibility." Ferry, op. cit., p. 54. In Ferry's view, this makes it impossible for Judaism to identify with environmentalism. Man can dispose of plants and animals to a certain extent, but not at will. "According to the Pentateuch, slaughter should not only be practiced without cruelty, but also in moderation... There is no confusion possible here between animal and man in the framework of the great cosmos." Ibid., p. 101.

148 Wigoda, op. cit.
151 Lamm, op. cit.
153 Schwartz continues, "This reassertion of pagan theologies, customs, and language understands paganism as a world view which sees Nature as Holy. Eastern religions are often included in the list of religions of nature, as well, with the many significant theological and cultural differences between the various historical cultures glossed over." Ibid.
155 "Pollution has become a luxury of possessors, as in Paris, where the air of the 16th arrondissement is today more polluted than that of the 11th, which is more populated. In this justice, the 'beautiful quarters' of our cities, with their fuel heating, their air conditioned buildings, grand consumers of energy, are more polluted than the industrial suburbs." Pelt, op. cit., p. 70.
158 In an article in *The New York Times*, John Tierney writes, "Recycling may be the most wasteful activity in modern America; a waste of time and money, a waste of human and natural resources... Americans... have embraced recycling as a transcendental experience, an act of moral redemption. We're not just reusing our garbage, we're performing a rite of atonement for the sin of excess." Lamm, Technion lecture, op. cit.
159 Simon, op cit. p. 51.
161 As Theodor Herzl put it: "Emancipation had become impossible in the places where we lived. We had developed strangely in the ghetto into a middle-class nation, and so became a terrible competition for the middle class. So, after the Emancipation, we belonged to the circle of the bourgeoisie and have to survive a double pressure, both from the inside and externally." Theodor Herzl, *Der Judenstaat*. In: *Zionistische Schriften*. Berlin-Charlottenburg: Juedischer Verlag, 1905, p. 62. German.
162 Gordon had another purpose: the Jews' return to manual labor. He claimed that the Jewish people "suffered from a profound illness which needed a fundamental
investigation and radical healing... A people that has been totally detached from
nature, that has been enclosed within walls for millennia, a people which was used
to all types of life – except to a life of labor – cannot without the application of all its
willpower become again a living, natural, working nation. We are lacking the essential:
labor – not enforced – but the labor through which the people grows together with
Publishers, p. 50. German.

Israel philosopher Eliezer Schweid writes that “The notion of diaspora which has been
explained in the Zionist ideology mainly in the sense of the geographic, social, and
political diaspora of the Jewish people, became with Gordon a notion which applies
to modern man in general. Diaspora is the existential state of man cut off from nature,
the source of his life. Diaspora is the submission of man to his inclination for power.
Because of that, the return of the Jewish people to its land is not only the quest for
redemption in a national sense – but also the quest for redemption in the general

In other anti-Semitic circles, the Jews were reproached with being cosmopolitan rather
than linked to the soil of one country. This is only one of the many oft-repeated anti-
Semitic stereotypes which have been internalized by Jews. New myths keep emerging.
One of these is that the Jews led themselves to slaughter without resistance in the
Second World War. For example, in France the Jews represented one percent of the
pre-war population while they were 15-20 percent of the resistance movement. B.

"According to Max Weber, after their dispersion, the Jews have progressively trans­
formed themselves into a host nation and a pariah nation. They have acted intentionally
so, and not in submitting themselves to external constraints. ‘The social isolation of
the Jews’, this ghetto in the strongest sense of the term, originated in a free choice
and decision, and that reinforced itself... It is in emancipating themselves from the
ritual prescriptions of the Torah, in liberating themselves from the ghetto that the Jews
themselves have created, that the Christian community has been able to establish
universal religion. It is also this voluntary ghetto... which is supposed to be at the
origin of the moral dualism Judaism is supposed to be in its relation with others. As
far as Sombart is concerned, he affirms that it is the ghetto which has made of the
Jews, a cast of despised pariahs: ‘We have reasons to believe that certain categories
of Jews have undergone the ghetto life not out of constraints, but because that life
conformed to their natural inclinations’.” From Freddy Raphael, *Ghetto Subi. Ghetto

The following quote from Simon Schama bears this out: “I remembered someone in
a Cambridge common room pestering the self-designated ‘non-Jewish Jew’ and Marxist
historian Isaac Deutscher about his roots. ‘Trees have roots,’ he shot back, scornfully,
‘Jews have legs.’” Schama, *op. cit.*, p. 29.

"An examination of Jewish ethical literature reveals very little about love for and
preservation of nature. Why? The answer is our long exile. For many centuries the
nations who ‘hosted’ us reminded us that we were not citizens with equal rights. We
were not part of their landscape. When monarchs called upon Jewish advisers, it was
not to ask them about the Jewish approach to environmental problems. Their purpose
was to enlarge the national treasury as quickly as possible. Whenever Jews were able
to develop their own communal culture, however, they applied Jewish principles to their environment. When our Sages extended the prohibition against raising sheep and goats in the Land of Israel to Babylon, they said, ‘We acted in Babylon as if we were in the Land of Israel.’ “ (Bavli Bava Batra 80a) Aryeh Strikovsky, G-d, Man and Tree. *B’Or HaTorah*. No. 10, 1997–8, pp. 25, 27–8.

169 Ehrenfeld & Bentley, op. cit.

170 “… while Hasidism does not directly declare nature as holy, it finds in it sufficient potentialities for the sacred to allow for a greater respect for and closeness to the natural world, while the Mitnagdic dualism so completely desacralizes nature as to leave it completely neutral and irrelevant religiously, to be viewed totally objectively and without any feeling of relationship whatever… For Hasidism, which is immanentistic, man has a kinship with other created beings, a symbiotic relationship with nature, and hence should maintain a sense of respect, if not reverence, for the natural world which is infused with the presence of God. The Mitnagdic view, emphasizing divine transcendence, leaves no place for such feelings, and conceived the Man-nature relation as completely one of subject-to-object, thus allowing for the exploitation of nature by science and technology and — were it not for the halakhic restraints which issue from revelation, and not from theology — the ecological abuse of the natural world as well.” Lamm, Technion lecture, op. cit.

171 The statement that *mitnaggedim* do not relate to nature is only true to a limited extent. Haim Volozhyn (1749–1821) describes the coming of the Messiah as follows: “Suddenly I feel the sun shining much more powerfully than it had before. What a brightness! Then I suddenly hear the birds in the garden chirping a new tune, a stirring, enchanting melody. And then I hear a noise coming from the street below. I put my head out of the window and I see Eli the cobbler running in great excitement. ‘What is it, Eli, what has happened to the sun’s rays? How come the birds are singing so marvelously? How come the trees are suddenly blooming with new leaves? What is happening?’ ‘What, Rabbi, don’t you know?’ says Eli, staring at me. ‘The Messiah has come.’” As related by Soloveitchik. In: Pinchas H. Peli, On Repentance: In the thought and oral discourses of Joseph B. Soloveitchik. Jerusalem: Oroth, 1980, p. 185.

172 “A nature-boy like Konrad Lorenz can face nature and take care of himself, right in the middle of the wilderness; he knows this fact and he feels an inner glow when noticing it; he is proud to be a nature-boy. A city boy and a Jew-boy like Sigmund Freud will be lost in the wilderness; contemplating this fact he will be filled with anxiety and irritated helplessness; he will at once notice this and be filled with shame and guilt and further anxiety and further irritation. He will wish to change the subject but will feel obliged to go on — regardless of the torment or enjoying the torment, and wondering which of these two options regarding torment is true. Thus we have a full-blown neurosis on our hands — one which surfaces by a simple intellectual exercise.” Joseph Agassi, Towards a Rational Philosophical Anthropology. The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1977, p. 104.


174 J. Cohen, Be Fertile and Increase, op. cit.

175 Benstein, op. cit.


179 If some Jews represent Jewish attitudes as being closer to those of environmentalism than they really are – thus distorting them – this sometimes leads people to interpretations that are even further beyond the boundaries of Judaism. For example, the dust-jacket of Ellen Bernstein’s *Ecology & the Jewish Spirit* contains two such comments on the book: “A welcome and powerful voice is now added to all those dedicated to preserving the integrity and sacred quality of the planet earth.” Thomas Berry; “This timely collection, bringing out the ecological soul of Judaism, is a cause for celebration. Its many refreshing voices call Jewish spirituality to reawaken to its own glad reverence for Earth.” Joanna Macy. Op. cit., dust-jacket.


181 In the last few years, however, it seems that Orthodox interest in the subject has been increasing somewhat.

182 One also gets the impression – even if it cannot be substantiated – that few Orthodox Jews militate in Jewish environmentalist advocacy groups.

183 For some additional aspects of this issue, see: Manfred Gerstenfeld, Neo-paganism in the Public Square and Its Relevance to Judaism. *Jerusalem Letter/Viewpoints*, No. 392, October 15, 1998.
Chapter Three

Environmental Attitudes in Halakha

A broad perspective on how classical Judaism relates to environmental issues can be obtained principally through reviewing the Halakha. This is the body of Jewish laws which prescribes rules to be followed by Jews in many areas of life, and relates to the actions of both the community and the individual. For the observant Jew, these laws are normative.

The Halakha’s origin lies in both the written and oral Torah which, according to Jewish tradition, constitute the Divine revelation to Moses. The written Torah consists of 613 commandments which regulate all major aspects of Jewish life. These laws are specifically meant for the Jewish people. Judaism does not try either to impose them on non-Jews or to convince them to convert.

Nevertheless, non-Jews are expected to practice the seven Noachide laws at the very least. These forbid idolatry as well as the vain use of God’s name, murder, sexual transgressions, theft and eating the flesh of live animals and command adhering to the law in general. Besides eating the flesh of live animals, two more of these laws are of relevance to the subject of this study: the recognition of God and the prohibition of idolatry. The latter includes revering nature – or part of it – as sacred.

According to Jewish tradition, God gave Moses not only the oral Torah, but also principles for interpreting the written Torah. The Oral Law which further developed over time was codified in the land of Israel around the year 200 by R. Yehuda the Prince. This codification is known as the Mishnah. Discussions of the Mishnah in Babylonia and the land of Israel led, respectively, to the writing of the Babylonian and the Jerusalem (or Palestinian) Talmud in the 6th century. These in turn became the basis for further halakhic discussions. Jews who required halakhic decisions referred their questions to Jewish scholars. Their answers, known as the responsa literature, extend Jewish law even further.

In the 12th century, Maimonides summarized the entire Jewish Law up to his time in a codex which he called ‘Mishneh Torah’, ‘the repetition of the Torah’.
Rabbi Yosef Karo, who lived in 16th century Palestine, compiled an updated codex called the *Shulhan Arukh* ('the set table'). Over the centuries, this became the chief book for regulating the observant Jew's life, mainly in Sephardi communities. Ashkenazi communities tend to follow the Halakha laid down in the Mappa commentary which Rabbi Moses Isserles wrote on Karo's codex. Thus Halakha differs somewhat from community to community.

Additional Halakhot derive from responsa and rabbinical decrees in later periods. Many of these have been summarized in glosses on the *Shulhan Arukh*.

**Rabbinical authority**

For many centuries Judaism has not had a central, generally accepted halakhic authority. With the end of the Babylonian Gaonate in the 11th century, its hegemonic Halakha center disappeared. Several geographic centers developed, and the individual Jewish community became independent in its legislation. Moreover, each rabbi is autonomous in answering his community's halakhic questions. In the big Jewish agglomerations of the last centuries, Hasidim did not feel obligated by the responsa of the Mitnagdai's rabbinical authorities, and vice versa.

The overall weakening effect of the community's autonomy on the edifice of Jewish law is only partially mitigated by the accepted practice of rabbis addressing themselves, on difficult questions, to a limited number of important halakhic scholars. The latter often disagree. In dealing with contemporary Halakha, therefore, it is difficult to determine what is an authoritative rabbinic ruling, even if each generation had outstanding authorities who were internationally respected and consulted.

Moreover, with the emancipation of the Jews in the 19th century, some of them started to develop Jewish communities which did not accept the principle of halakhic authority. In recent centuries therefore, the overall authority of Halakha over Jews has weakened. While all Orthodox Jews accept a core of common Halakha, the rulings of rabbinical authorities differ on many issues without recourse to some mechanism for reaching a binding decision. In other words: observant Judaism has no High Court of Jewish Law with ultimate authority.

Many Halakhot refer to issues which we nowadays include in the field of the environment. A systematic review of Halakha will thus provide a detailed understanding of the observant Jew's normative behavior toward the environment. It will also elucidate what the commonly-accepted positions are and where there is disagreement.
In view of the extent of the body of Jewish Law, such a study will require scholarly work for many years, especially as the references to environmental issues are so fragmented.

Diversity of opinions

Legal discussion leading to divergent positions has long existed in Judaism. Even in classical discussions, diverging opinions have been preserved. In the Mishnah, differing positions on the same legal issues are often noted. Within classical Judaism, there is a core of law which has been generally accepted, even if its boundaries are not defined exactly; but on other laws there is sometimes substantial disagreement.

This chapter relates to various categories of Halakhot with environmental aspects. In doing so, elements of disagreement are occasionally raised. Strategic conclusions, particularly those relating to broad issues such as the current subject, cannot be drawn from a series of contested positions. In order to be credible, they must be principally based on Halakhot on which there is a consensus of opinion.

As far as possible, therefore, analysis here is based on the core of Halakhot which are generally accepted. The common holds the potential for the conclusion; diversity gives it further perspective.

Modern writings and environmental Halakha

The aim of this chapter is to arrive at a strategic perspective on the Halakha's attitude toward environmental issues. To do this, one has to identify a sample of Halakhot which refer to major environmental categories. Modern Jewish writings mention a cross-section of 'environmental Halakhot' which I consider large enough for this purpose.

So many Halakhot are mentioned in modern writings that reference here to all of them is not possible. In this chapter, therefore, a number of these Halakhot are grouped together. Even if much more material could be found by going through the halakhic literature, it is likely only to provide more details, rather than affect the conclusions. Besides the Halakhot quoted in modern writings, reference has also been made to additional primary sources. The latter was particularly necessary with regard to contemporary Halakha, as few secondary sources exist.

Categorizing and integrating this material laid the basis for the strategic review of the attitudes of Jewish law toward environmental issues. Nonetheless, a detailed assessment of Jewish attitudes toward environmental issues, as expressed in Halakha, will have to wait for the results of studies yet to be undertaken.
A number of categories of Jewish law relating to environmental issues will be defined, and examples given thereof. From an integrated analysis of these, a picture will emerge of where Judaism broadly stands on environmental issues.

However, the common core is much larger than any uncertainty in the margins. Even if one’s analysis is based on the lowest common denominator, the broad conclusion will remain the same. This is even partly true for the most controversial field discussed in this chapter, vegetarianism.

Reasons for the commandments

While the Torah frequently does not explain the meaning or the value judgments underlying specific commandments, commentators attempt to identify them. The perspective on our subject can be sharpened by studying the writings of these commentators and trying to expand on their interpretations. However, rabbinical authorities have been in disagreement on what these value judgments are. Ancient sources distinguish between mishpatim and hukkim. Maimonides says that all commandments have a reason, i.e. a useful purpose. He defines mishpatim as those laws whose usefulness is evident to common people; in other words, that category of God-given law which, for its benefit, civil society would have instituted on a rational basis even if they were not of Divine origin. He defines hukkim as those whose usefulness is not evident to common men. Nachmanides also says that the hukkim are useful to humanity, but that man does not know in what way they are so.

Rabbinical authorities often disagree on the reasoning behind the commandments. A typical example are the so-called kilayim laws (constancy of species – see below) which belong to the category of hukkim. Here two of the greatest classical Jewish scholars hold opposing views. Rashi says that these laws are an order from the king [i.e. God] for which there seems to be no rational explanation. Maimonides explains that kilayim were forbidden because the mixing of species was an aberration practiced by pagans.

Three categories of environmental relevance

Three categories of Halakha of environmental relevance will be discussed below:

1. Classical Halakhot which relate to issues such as sustainability, environmental health, animal and nature protection, pollution control, environmental hygiene, allocation of space and many other environmental matters.
II. Recent and contemporary halakhic decisions on environmental problems. This is a much less developed subject in Jewish publications. Halakhic questions are often raised orally and answered in the same way by rabbinical authorities. Furthermore, large parts of the recent responsa literature are also not very accessible: much of what there is, therefore, remains unknown to contemporary halakhic scholars.

One pertinent issue which has drawn recent attention is smoking, including passive smoking. This is due to major new evidence about their harmful effects. This category also includes halakhic attitudes toward vegetarianism and animal experimentation. Several modern responsa refer to experiments on animals for medical purposes.

III. Indications as to the potential future development of Halakha on environmental issues. This category is quite undeveloped, and is only rarely mentioned in Jewish writings. One example refers to the extension of the bal tashhit principle regarding the permissibility of nuclear war.

This chapter deals mainly with the first category, although some attention will be given to the other two.

Furthermore, this chapter deals with another important issue: Halakha and hierarchy.

I. Halakhot in Classical Literature

As noted in Chapter One, recent publications list and interpret a number of halakhic principles which give broad indications for Jewish attitudes in several environmental areas. These break down into various sub-categories and issues:

a) Principles referring to the prohibition of wanton destruction: bal tashhit. The rabbinical decisions forbidding hunting as a sport can be considered partially related to this.

b) Halakhot in the broad area of nuisance limitation and health protection. One major principle is pikku'ah nefesh, ‘one should transgress rather than die.’ When endangered, life should take precedence over observance. With only three exceptions – murder, idolatry and incest – all commandments are superseded by preservation of life considerations. The principle that one should not unnecessarily put one’s life at risk expresses a similar attitude.

Nuisance limitation and health protection are dealt with in a variety of Halakhot. The Bible and Talmud also give many examples of pollution prevention and abatement to prevent hindrance to others. Some of these Halakhot can be seen as early environmental hygiene policies.
c) Laws concerning land policies and soil protection. These include the commandments concerning the sabbatical and jubilee years. The commandment prohibiting the raising of goats and sheep in the land of Israel may also be considered in this category.

d) Several Halakhot refer to the broad field of animal protection. *Za'ar ba'alei hayyim*, the prevention of unnecessary pain to animals, is often quoted in modern publications. Another commandment is *shillu'ah baken* (sending away the mother bird that is sitting on fledglings or eggs in the nest, before taking these).\(^{14}\)

e) Constancy of species (*kilayim*) is another area which the Halakha refers to.

f) To some extent, the laws defining elements of the layout of Levite cities are precursors of modern concepts for sustainable cities. Some rules regarding refuge towns are also in this category.\(^{15}\)

g) The environmental aspects of the Shabbat laws comprise a sub-category of their own. Some writings here refer to laws which could be included in earlier sub-categories. The laws for holidays are largely similar to those for Shabbat.

h) Other issues with halakhic rules of environmental relevance include the dietary laws (*kasrulut*) and fasting.

**Halakhot and elements of environment**

The various halakhic categories mentioned above can be related to the environmental elements as they are currently defined:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Environmental Element</th>
<th>Halakic Category</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Relating to nature:</td>
<td>– <em>Bal Tashhit</em></td>
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<td></td>
<td>– Constancy of Species</td>
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<td></td>
<td>– Hunting</td>
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<td>Relating to animals(^{16}):</td>
<td>– <em>Za'ar ba'alei hayyim</em></td>
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<td></td>
<td>– Animal Welfare</td>
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<td></td>
<td>– Constancy of Species</td>
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<td></td>
<td>– Ritual Slaughter</td>
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<tr>
<td>Preservation of natural resources:</td>
<td>– <em>Bal Tashhit</em></td>
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<td></td>
<td>– Sabbatical and Jubilee Years</td>
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<td>– Animal Protection(^{17})</td>
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<td>– Shabbat Laws</td>
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<td>– Dietary Laws</td>
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<td>Nuisance/pollution:</td>
<td>– Nuisance Limitation and Health Protection</td>
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<tr>
<td>Allocation of space:</td>
<td>– Levite and Refuge Cities</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
We will now discuss the various sub-categories of environmental Halakhot.

a) Sub-category: The prohibition of wanton destruction

_Bal tashhit_ (‘do not destroy’) is the halakhic principle most frequently mentioned in contemporary Jewish publications to elaborate Judaism’s attitude toward the environment.\(^{18}\) Its origin is in the Torah: “When in your war against a city you have to besiege it a long time in order to capture it, you must not destroy its trees, wielding the ax against them. You may eat of them, but you must not cut them down. Are trees of the field human to withdraw before you into the besieged city? Only trees that you know do not yield food may be destroyed; you may cut them down for constructing siege works against the city that is waging war with you, until it has been reduced.”\(^{19}\)

The first verse indicates that, even in times of war, Divine commandments impose certain constraints. The second verse, however, permits the destruction of other parts of nature in wartime. War has signaled a period of destruction from time immemorial, from the poisoning of wells in ancient times through policies of ‘scorched earth’, the nuclear destruction of humans and the ecosystem in the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, to Iraq’s intentional pollution of water with oil, in the Gulf War.

In the next chapter, some examples will be discussed of how several Israelite Biblical leaders, both God-fearing and wicked, carried out destructive policies. Referring to these incidents, Lamm states: “The verses in Deuteronomy 20:19 & 20 are not altogether clear and admit a variety of interpretations. But this much is obvious, that the Torah forbids wanton destruction. Vandalism against nature violates a Biblical prohibition. Those few cases in scriptural history in which this norm was violated, are special cases.”\(^{20}\)

Many detailed rules have been deduced from the _bal tashhit_ principle, including the prohibition from wantonly destroying a tree’s fruit.\(^{21}\) One of the oldest collections of rabbinical traditions, the _Sifrei_, written around 300 C.E., already extends the legislation of wanton destruction to prohibit interference with water sources.\(^{22}\) The Talmud extends it to include an uneconomical use of fuel.\(^{23}\)

Maimonides mentions further extensions of the principle, pointing out that _bal tashhit_ refers not only to periods of war, but to all times.\(^{24}\) Whoever transgresses this prohibition is to be punished by flogging. However, he also states that it is not considered destruction to cut down a fruit tree which is causing damage to other trees or a field.\(^{25}\)
According to Maimonides, a tree that does not produce fruit may be cut down, as may fruit trees which produce very little fruit. (He indicates the quantities that define what is "very little fruit").

Maimonides also states that economic considerations allow the cutting down of a fruit tree (thereby already participating in the environment versus economy debate). According to commentators, this may be the case, for instance, if the building value of the land exceeds the value of the fruit. However, among later authorities there is disagreement between the rabbis as to whether one is allowed to pull down a fruit tree in order to build a house. One major halakhic authority, the Turey Zahav, allows it; another, the Netsiv from Wolozhyn, is much more restrictive. (Among contemporary rabbis, Ovadia Yosef also permits the cutting of fruit-bearing trees to facilitate building a house in their place.)

Furthermore, Maimonides lists as prohibitions included in the bal tashhit principle, the breaking of utensils, the tearing of clothes, the destruction of buildings, the blocking of wells, and the destruction of food.

The commandment of bal tashhit – so central in the thoughts of many contemporary Jewish writers – focuses first and foremost on that part of the environment which is useful to man, rather than on the preservation of the entire environment. Yehuda Feliks points out that this is a more general attitude in Halakha.

Extending the principle further

One of the most extended interpretations of the Biblical verse has been given by the 19th century scholar, Samson Raphael Hirsch. He sees in bal tashhit an example of the prohibition of the useless destruction of any object. He adds that this law: "becomes the most wide-ranging warning to man not to abuse the position he has been given in the world for moody, passionate or mindless destruction of things on earth. Only for the wise use has God put the earth at his feet, when He said: 'Master it; rule over it.'"

In widening the prohibition, however, Hirsch may have combined two different issues. War is not an obvious inclusion in the category of 'moody, passionate or mindless destruction', as it may fulfill a specific purpose.

In the Middle Ages, the meaning of bal tashhit was interpreted by the author of Sefer haHinnukh: "The root of the commandment is in order to teach us to love the good and useful and be attached to it; and from there, the good will attach itself to us; and we will move away from bad and destructive things."
Sefer haHinnukh links the avoidance of destruction to religious practice: "And this is the way the pious and the people of good actions behave, they like peace, are happy in the well-being of others, bring them closer to the Torah, and will not destroy even a mustard seed from the world." 38

A far-reaching interpretation of bal tashhit is already found in the Talmud. R. Hisda says: "Whoever can eat bread made from barley and eats bread from wheat, transgresses the prohibition of bal tashhit." R. Papa says: "Whoever can drink beer and drinks wine, transgresses the prohibition of bal tashhit." The Talmud indicates, however, that these opinions are not accepted, as one should not eat inferior food, but rather care more for one's body than for money. 39

Maimonides applies the bal tashhit principle to what one places in the grave. He states that it is preferable to give clothes to the poor than "to throw them to the worms [in the grave]. Whoever puts too many clothes on the dead transgresses the prohibition of bal tashhit." 40

On the other hand, the Talmud brings examples of destruction for the educational purposes of teaching people moderation and avoidance of falling into extremes: "Mar son of Ravina arranged a wedding feast for his son. He saw the sages who were extremely joyful. He brought an expensive cup, worth four hundred zuz and broke it in front of them. They became sad." 41 This is followed by a similar case: "Rav Ashi arranged a wedding feast for his son and saw the sages who were extremely joyful. He brought a cup of white glass and broke it in front of them. They became sad." 42 None of the major Talmud commentators raises the question of whether this transgresses the prohibition of bal tashhit.

Among contemporary writers, Gordis adds that bal tashhit has nothing to do with the sanctity of private property. One is forbidden to destroy not only the property of others, but also one's own, or even ownerless property. This principle derives, in part, from the recognition that what we are wont to call 'our' property is not really our own, but God's. 43

E. Schwartz reviews classical Jewish literature on bal tashhit from the point of view of environmental ethics. He finds that two different traditions can be identified in the interpretation of the verse in Deuteronomy by two important classical Bible commentators, Rashi and Ibn Ezra:

"Rashi separates human beings from nature and allows nature an existence independent of human rights and needs. Nature is not to be understood as human property with which one can do as one wishes. Ibn Ezra 44 unites the human being with nature, and therefore demands that people evaluate their behavior towards nature in terms
of its ultimate effect on humans. It is radically anthropocentric be­cause it determines nature’s worth in terms of its worth to human beings.”

Using the term ‘radically anthropocentric’ for Ibn Ezra’s position lays a misleading emphasis, in view of the many constraints Judaism puts on the Jew’s actions toward nature. Even if some classical commen­tators emphasize man’s interests over those of nature, as Ibn Ezra seems to do here, none argue that this overrides obedience to God. Their position is based on the view that man is the primary servant of the Creator.

Meir Ayali points out that, in the responsa literature, attitudes toward felling fruit trees seem to have become more restrictive over the centuries. He states that Maimonides decided without hesitation that a palm tree standing close to a wall near a public place should be cut down, because it might fall – thereby constituting a public danger.

Ayali claims that, in later responsa, rabbinical authorities were reluctant to allow fruit trees to be cut down for any reason, out of the fear that transgressors would be Divinely punished. He relates this to the story in the Talmud where R. Hanina says that his son Sikhath died before his time because of his untimely cutting down of a fig tree.

Chatam Sofer is asked by Rabbi Yakov Weiler whether one can fell grapevines in order to build houses on the land, thereby yielding a profit to the owner. The argumentation of the responsum indicates that Chatam Sofer sees this seemingly simple question as a complex issue. He replies that if the land is required, it does not fall under the prohibition of bal tashhit. He stresses that, where possible, the vines should be pulled out with their roots and some earth, to be planted elsewhere. Chatam Sofer underlines that one should be very sure of one’s economic calculations before pulling the vines out, because if no profit ensues from this act, it may come under the bal tashhit prohibition.

**Hunting**

Hunting is another issue which deals with destruction. Norman Solomon points out that “although Jewish religious tradition despises hunting for sport this is on ethical and ritual grounds rather than in the interest of conservation.” Halakhic scholar J. David Bleich states that the main reason is probably concern about the bad influence that hunting has on people, rather than concern for the animal victims. These views illustrate how Jewish scholars and environmentalists may arrive at similar practical attitudes for very different reasons.
Hunting as a sport was controversial in Jewish society long before modern environmentalism emerged, and was subject to halakhic ruling. One of the most-quoted responsa on this subject is that of the 18th century Rabbi Yechezkel Landau, known as the Noda biYehuda. When asked whether a Jew is permitted to hunt game with a rifle, he is surprised that anyone should ask this question. “The only hunters mentioned in the Torah are Nimrod and Esau. Hunting is not a sport for the children of Abraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov… How can a Jew go to kill a living creature only with the purpose of hunting for pleasure?”

Rakover concludes that some rabbinic authorities consider the prohibition on hunting explicit, while others see it as implicit. All agree, however, that hunting is immoral and opposed to Jewish ethics. Among the halakhic objections mentioned are that it is wasteful, it is in the category of bal tashhit, it causes distress to the hunted animal, it is in the category of za’ar ba’alei hayyim and one wilfully slaughters in a non-kosher way even if the animal itself is kosher. In addition, hunting wastes time and the hunter exposes himself to unnecessary risks. It also is done in the company of undesirable people, and follows a non-Jewish way of life.

Much has been written on the halakhic issue of bal tashhit. Even if its exact limits cannot be determined, due to the lack of a central halakhic authority, there is a substantial core element of prohibitions which are implicitly accepted by all rabbinical authorities.

b) Sub-category: Health protection and limitation of nuisance

A variety of environmental conditions are currently perceived as ‘nuisance’. Many of these may have a negative impact on health, such as excessive noise, smells, excessive heat, creating conditions for contagious diseases, etc. There are several Halakhot relating to these diverse issues.

The Halakha also forbids a person to damage his own health. This goes beyond the conventional boundaries of environmental interest, which tends to limit itself to damage to third parties and not to what one does to oneself. Jewish thought often considers these two types of damage to be related.

Many halakhic decisions deal with issues of health protection. The general principle of pikku’ah nefesh is central to maintaining life, overriding all religious commandments except murder, idolatry and incest. While all rabbinical authorities agree that the Shabbat may be desecrated to save life, there are significant disagreements about the value judgments behind this idea.

There have been many rabbinical debates as to how far the detailed rules deriving from the principle of pikku’ah nefesh extend to preser-
vation of a person's life. Mention is made of a rabbinic discussion on whether it is permitted to prepare medicines on Shabbat if no patient is in immediate need of them.\textsuperscript{56}

Another indication of the limits of \textit{pikku'ah nefesh} occurs with reference to autopsies: Halakha objects to them out of respect for the dead (\textit{kevod haberiyot}). However, an autopsy is permitted if the life of a specific patient can be saved as a result of an autopsy. The \textit{pikku'ah nefesh} of that patient takes precedence over the \textit{kevod haberiyot} of another person in certain opinions.\textsuperscript{57} While an important scholar, Jacob Ettlinger,\textsuperscript{58} held the opposite opinion, general halakhic practice did not accept this.\textsuperscript{59}

\textit{Noise control}

In recent years noise has increasingly come to be considered a problem of health protection as well as nuisance. Over the centuries, various responsa have contained rulings forbidding noise pollution. The Mishnah states that neighbors can prevent the opening of a store in a common courtyard by claiming that they cannot sleep due to the noise of customers entering and exiting; however, they cannot object to the noise of a hammer or a grinding mill in a craftsman's home; nor can they object to the noise children make if one of the courtyard's residents is a religious school teacher.\textsuperscript{60}

Freudenstein refers to the extension of this principle by later rabbinical authorities, quoting commentators on \textit{Tur} and \textit{Shulhan Arukh Hoshen Mishpat}, section 156: "Later authorities extended this ruling to new craft workshops whose noise might constitute a nuisance. The Mishnah is interpreted as allowing exercise of such crafts only where they are already in existence at the time of the protest. New craftsmen must have the consent of the other dwellers of the compound."\textsuperscript{61}

The Talmud says that if one has a house in a collective courtyard, one cannot let it to a medical doctor,\textsuperscript{62} a craftsman,\textsuperscript{63} a weaver or a schoolteacher, whether Jewish or not. Most commentators, including Rashi, cite as the reason the noise of those entering and exiting.\textsuperscript{64}

\textit{Nuisance}

Zvi Ilani has reviewed the way rabbinical sources deal with nuisance and whether the person who causes it may continue with it against payment.\textsuperscript{65} He concludes that, while this is possible in some cases, the community cannot allow a nuisance which causes severe health problems, even against sizable payment by the perpetrator.\textsuperscript{66} Another category for which there does not seem to be any buying-off by the perpetrator, is one that will cause serious suffering in the
future. A third category where financial compensation is impossible concerns nuisance which affects the whole community directly or indirectly. This is particularly the case when the agreement of all those affected cannot be obtained. A fourth category concerns nuisance that causes moral or religious damage to the public.

Eliezer Diamond has analyzed how Halakha relates to some aspects of the conflict between the requirements of the community and those of the individual, who often compete for the use of space and resources. He concludes that pre-modern “Halakha, faced with the prospect of nuisance or pollution on the one hand or economic deprivation on the other, accepts the former to avoid the latter.”

Diamond qualifies this, however, by underlining that the economic condition of both Jews and non-Jews in pre-modern times were radically different from the present situation. “Many more people were living at or near the subsistence level. Closing down someone’s mill or shop could have resulted in starvation for the owner or for members of his family.” A second qualification points out the position of Halakha that costs of pollution control have to be shared in an equitable way.

Other health aspects

Another important aspect of Jewish law in the field of health protection is the obligatory burial of excrement in the ground, even in time of war. “Further, there shall be an area for you outside the camp, where you may relieve yourself. With your gear you shall have a spike, and when you have squatted you shall dig a hole with it and cover up your excrement. Since the Lord your God moves about in your camp to protect you and to deliver your enemies to you, let your camp be holy; let Him not find anything unseemly among you and turn away from you.”

A different subject that the Mishnah mentions is that a husband cannot compel his wife to move from a middle-sized town to a large town. In the commentaries the reason given for this is environmental health protection: it is difficult to live in a large city where houses are close to each other, and where there is no fresh air.

In this category there are also a variety of references to domestic animals. One Mishnah mentions that it is forbidden to raise a dog unless he is held by a leash. Maimonides says that this warning is based on the damage a dog can cause. The 15th century Mishnah commentator Obadiah Bertinoro adds that this is because dogs bite and bark, and a pregnant woman may abort from fear.

In the Torah we find a Halakha which refers to nuisance limitation: after a priest has dealt with burnt offerings in the Temple, he is told
to “take off his vestments and put on other vestments, and carry the ashes outside the camp to a clean place.” Commenting on this, Maimonides says that the remains should be protected in these places “from being dispersed by wind and pigs”; Meiri comments that they should be kept “from being washed away by floods.”

Several Talmudic texts refer to nuisance limitation and also consider elements of health protection. Among these are laws which forbid polluting activities within Jerusalem: “One should not erect there a dung-heap. One should not build there a melting-oven, one should not establish vegetable and fruit gardens, with the exception of the rose garden which has been there since the time of the first prophets. One should not grow chickens there. One should not leave a corpse overnight there.”

There are many more examples in Mishnah and Talmud of Halakhhot forbidding pollution at specified sites. One cannot open a bakery or a painter’s shop under somebody else’s granary, nor erect a cow shed there. This is because the heat of the baker’s or painter’s ovens causes hindrance, as does the odor of the cows’ dung.

Although in Biblical times Jewish graves may have been close to individual dwellings, in later periods Jewish cemeteries had to be outside towns. Like other potential pollution-causing hindrances, this is mentioned in the Mishnah: “One removes the place where dead animal bodies are gathered, the graves and the tanneries, for 50 cubits from the town. One only puts a tannery on the east side of town.” Commentators explain that the east wind is hot and usually blows in so leisurely a manner that it does not convey odors to the town. Others explain that east winds blow infrequently in the Land of Israel.

Another type of hindrance concerns darkening the light of somebody’s window. The Mishnah states that it is forbidden to construct a wall within four ells of a neighbor’s window. The Talmud explains that one should not block out the light coming in at his window. Ritva explains in his commentary that whoever builds a wall without keeping sufficient distance takes somebody’s else’s light “and the air in his possession which he enjoys and there is no greater damage than blocking somebody’s light.”

Specific nuisance cases

In the framework of overall relations between neighbors, we find a series of cases in the Shulhan Arukh of causing nuisance to one’s neighbor which seem to us to have an environmental character. We do not know, however, how these cases were perceived at the time that they occurred. If one neighbor has the right to let the
rainwater from his roof run onto the land of another neighbor, this does not give him the right to let more noxious water run onto his neighbor's land. Emanuel Quint, a contemporary commentator on the *Shulhan Arukh*, offers an example: if a person has the right to conduct rainwater onto his neighbor's land, he cannot conduct dirty laundry water instead.92

The *Shulhan Arukh* states that a community can prevent a citizen from setting up his gutter pipes in such a way that the water from his roof is conducted into the public domain.95 Furthermore, it states that a person on the lower floor in a condominium may not maintain an oven in his apartment unless the ceiling is at least 7 feet above its top. The upper neighbor must provide a good floor of at least 11 inches beneath his stove or oven.94

A neighbor on a lower floor may not use machinery that causes movements or vibrations which may affect products stored by a neighbor on the upper floor.95

Apart from the ones already mentioned above, there are further limitations on the distance of noxious odors and particles from the nearest inhabitants. This also applies to food processing facilities and beehives.96

Another ruling forbids the nuisance caused indirectly by a person who works with blood or meat: the shrieking of birds attracted by the waste, or the filth caused by their bloody feet, may upset sick or sensitive neighbors.97,98 Many similar prohibitions exist.

**Responsa literature**

The responsa literature has dealt with several specific nuisance cases. Congregants of a synagogue complain to Maharam that the smoke and odor of a bathhouse next to the synagogue is causing them severe nuisance. Maharam refuses their request for closure because the bathhouse functions only once a week, and the law forbidding smoke refers only to continual smoke. With regard to odors, he says that, as even the odor from covered toilets is permitted, there can be no reason to forbid the odor from the bathhouse.100

Rashba wrote a responsum that smoke caused by regular households should not be evaluated in terms of the Talmudic injunction permitting the forced removal of a furnace. The latter refers only to ongoing or serious smoke such as that caused by 'industrial' furnaces.101

One person tells Rosh that his neighbor, a blacksmith, is causing him damage: his house vibrates each time the neighbor strikes with his hammer, preventing him from sleeping, and creating dust and smoke with his work. Rosh responds that, as the neighbor is a
Halakha-abiding Jew and the problems are caused by the neighbor’s willful actions, he is entitled to tell him to stop his nuisance causing activities.\(^{103}\)

Another responsum by Rosh refers to a case where a person has dug a well in his courtyard for collecting and storing rainwater. A lot of water has collected and overflowed into the neighbor’s cellar, making the courtyard stink. Rosh decides that the owner of the well has to repair it and pay for the damage caused.\(^{104}\)

In Ritva’s responsa, we find an indication that, while existent hindrance has to be accepted, it cannot be increased without the agreement of the person who will be increasingly disturbed. The question refers to a vineyard located within somebody else’s vineyard. The owner of the first vineyard owns an access road which passes through that of the second one. He then acquires additional vineyards next to the first one, which have access roads to the outside. However, he closes all of these and wants to use the existing access road for the new vineyards. In doing so, he considerably increases the traffic of workers and produce on that road, causing damage to the owner of the second vineyard.

Ritva replies that the second owner is entitled to stop the first one from using the road for any traffic other than the original vineyard. What is more, any damage which has already been caused should be paid for.\(^{105}\)

_Terumat Hadeshen\(^{106}\)_ is of the opinion that neighbors cannot stop somebody from producing occasional smoke, nor can they prevent a neighbor from building a new oven which produces such occasional smoke.\(^{107}\)

One of the responsa of Radbaz\(^{108}\) refers to a person who uses medicinal incense. This causes a bad smell to reach a neighbor’s home, and may endanger his baby’s health. The decision of Radbaz is that, although the person causing the nuisance is doing so in his own home, he must move it far enough away that the smell will not reach the neighbor’s house even on the common wind (even if there is doubt whether wind will carry the smell). Radbaz insists on this because of the potential danger to human life.\(^{109}\)

Rivash\(^{110}\) is asked about two men, one of whom has opened a weaving unit in his courtyard. His neighbor claims that the beating of the cloth during production damages his wall, as well as his wine. Furthermore, his wife is sick and the noise gives her headaches. Rivash confirms that the damage has indeed been caused, and that the owner of the weaving unit must move his operation elsewhere.\(^{111}\)

Maharalbach, a 16\(^{th}\) century chief rabbi of Jerusalem, is asked a question about two adjacent courtyards: in one of them, the owner
has introduced millstones.\textsuperscript{112} The owner of the second courtyard complains that this is destroying his walls and causing him damage; he thus requests removing it. The answer given is that a person can exercise his profession in his home in order to earn a living; however, he cannot receive customers in his home to sell his wares, because he can do so in the market thereby reducing noise hindrance to his neighbors.\textsuperscript{113}

A 16\textsuperscript{th} century responsum from Rabbi Shlomo Cohen\textsuperscript{114} refers to the case of a person living on the upper floor of a house; the pipe from his toilet descends through the wall of the apartment below, and from there the effluents flow into a ditch. A neighbor who buys the lower apartment wishes to close the pipe, claiming that he suffers from the smell. The rabbinical decision is that he has no right to close the pipe because it has been there for many years; the pipe is closed and the ditch is covered; neither is the smell very strong or continual.\textsuperscript{115}

In another responsum the same rabbi refers to the damage caused to the inhabitants of a town by the dyeing industry. He says that the economic interests of a city, dependent on the textile industry for its livelihood, take precedence over the damage caused to neighbors in the vicinity.\textsuperscript{116} However he comments that the owner of the business would do well to reduce the hindrance as much as possible.

In Chapter One, a responsum in line with this is mentioned from the 17\textsuperscript{th} century Italian rabbi, Shimshon Morpurgo. Chatam Sofer is asked by his son-in-law Rabbi Bunem about a case involving a potential future hindrance. Three people have inherited a house. One of them wishes to open a kind of pub on the upper floor; while one of the others living on the ground floor wishes to prevent this, claiming that it will cause him nuisance, mainly from noise. Rabbi Bunem says that there will be significant consequences if the complainant is judged to be in the right, as there are several shops in the community against which similar nuisance complaints might be launched, thereby affecting the livelihood of the owners. Chatam Sofer says that the Halakha is that the person on the upper floor should be prevented from opening the pub, where people would sit drinking wine. However, his opinion on this was not entirely clear-cut. Those selling wine and other goods from their homes cause less hindrance. Thus the case in question cannot be used as a precedent.\textsuperscript{117}

Meir Tamari, whose research has focused on economic aspects of Halakha, has attempted to draw a more general conclusion from Talmudic Halakhot and responsa on environmental nuisances. He considers that, in an independent Jewish state, planning should be carried out which permits the removal of sources of pollution: "The
community, being independent, should be able to allocate land and other resources in such a way as to provide for the common good this being the yardstick according to which ecological obstacles are considered in halakhic sources.”

c) Sub-category: Land policies and soil protection

The Torah sets out the commandment of the sabbatical year, shemittah. Each seventh year the land had to rest and lie fallow. “Six years you shall sow your land and gather in its yield; but in the seventh you shall let it rest and lie fallow. Let the needy among your people eat of it, and what they leave let the wild beasts eat. You shall do the same with your vineyards and your olive groves.” In the seventh year the Jew was not allowed to plow the land nor to sow seeds. What was growing in the sabbatical year by itself served as food for the poor and animals. From a modern environmental point of view, shemittah serves to prevent exhaustion of the land.

The law of shemittah applies only to the Land of Israel. Today adherence in Israel is almost total, even if generally symbolic. In Israel a national arrangement exists to fictitiously sell land to Gentiles. Secular agriculturalists adhere to this agreement for economic reasons: non-adherence would result in substantial loss of clientele.

Shemittah was the subject of one of the first halakhic debates to arise in Palestine, in relation to the first Zionist settlements in the late 19th century. Aryei Fishman writes that, while rabbis in the Diaspora suggested selling land to Gentiles and allowing them to work it during the seventh year, rabbis in Palestine insisted that all work on land cease throughout this year, whether it was done by Jew or Gentile. The first option, that of the fictitious land sale, prevailed and is now the predominant practice in Israel.

In recent years, the religious kibbutz movement has begun to pay more attention to shemittah laws by “abstaining from new plantings and by circumventing the letter of the law through introducing automated sowing machinery. Every kibbutz also symbolically excludes one tract of land from the formal sabbatical sale of its land, and leaves it fallow.” Some other religious settlements apply hydroponic cultures.

After each 49 years, a yovel year should be declared. In this Jubilee year the same prohibitions regarding working the land are applied as for the sabbatical year. In addition, all land sold during the preceding 49 years is returned to its original owner without compensation. This law is based on the Torah text: “The land shall not be sold in perpetuity, for the land is Mine; for you are strangers and sojourners with Me.”
The sabbatical and \textit{yovel} years can be interpreted in economic terms as ways of redistributing wealth and property. Gordis refers to both the social and the environmental aspects of these laws. The land lying fallow provided the poor with a source of food which he sees as "an important element... of social legislation for the underprivileged in ancient Israel."\cite{128} He adds: "But even more fundamental than the above agricultural and social functions, the law reaffirmed a deep religious principle: God was dramatically reasserting His ownership of the land, of which man is only a temporary custodian."\cite{129} The \textit{yovel} year is not applied today, and it is not known whether it was ever practiced in the past.

Another prohibition mentioned in the Mishnah is relevant to land protection: it concerns raising small cattle – goats and sheep – in the land of Israel.\cite{130} The motivation has environmental aspects as they are currently defined: they destroy fields and vineyards.\cite{131} One part of domesticated nature is protected from another,\cite{132} even though the principal reason is to protect the property of the Israelite landowners.

d) \textit{Sub-category: Animal protection}

Simultaneous with the growth of general environmentalist concerns in recent years, interest in animal protection has increased. This can be partially understood by the fear expressed by scientists that many species are facing extinction in the coming decades. The aggressiveness of certain sectors of the animal rights movement has also brought the subject to public attention.

In Jewish law there are numerous references to issues of animal welfare.

1) \textit{Za'ar ba'alei hayyim}

One important halakhic principle of relevance to animal welfare is the prevention of suffering to living creatures – \textit{za'ar ba'alei hayyim}. One central prohibition concerns \textit{ever min hahai}, the prohibition from eating a limb of a living animal. The Halakha is related to the text of Deuteronomy 12:23: "But make sure you do not partake of the blood; for the blood is the life, and you must not consume the life with the flesh." The prohibition of \textit{ever min hahai} is equally relevant to all humanity, as it is part of the seven Noachide laws.

Gordis considers \textit{za'ar ba'alei hayyim} and \textit{bal tashhit} to be the two key ethical principles within Judaism's environmental teachings. The former has several Biblical roots. He cites an example from the Torah: "Deuteronomy 22:10 forbids the farmer to plough with an ox and a donkey yoked together because the practice would obviously impose great hardship upon the weaker animal."\cite{133}
Gordis also cites other texts. Many would not qualify them as ‘animal welfare’ per se, but rather conditions which include aspects that may limit animal suffering. One refers to the young ox or sheep: “No animal from the herd or from the flock shall be slaughtered on the same day with its young.” Another imposes the principle of *shillu’ah ha’ken*—“If, along the road, you chance upon a bird’s nest in any tree or on the ground, with fledglings or eggs and the mother sitting over the fledglings or on the eggs, do not take the mother together with her young. Let the mother go, and take only the young, in order that you may fare well and have a long life.”

A further example of the Biblical attitude toward animal welfare is found in the following text: “I will also provide grass in the fields for your cattle — and thus you shall eat your fill.” The Talmud derives from this the idea that one has to feed one’s animals before eating. Rabbi Eliezer Waldenberg, a member of Israel’s Supreme Rabbinical Court, states in a responsum that even if man fasts for one reason or the other, he must still feed his animals to prevent their suffering.

A text sometimes quoted in modern Jewish publications on animal protection is, “You shall not boil a kid in its mother’s milk.” The meaning of this verse, repeated in Deuteronomy, is unclear. Rabbinical tradition derives from it one of the central laws of *kashrut* (dietary laws), which is not to eat meat and milk together.

2) Animal welfare

There are several examples where Jewish law goes beyond the prevention and elimination of animal pain. One is the text of the Decalogue, which in Exodus reads most incisively: “Six days you shall do your work, but on the seventh day you shall cease from labor, in order that your ox and your ass may rest.”

The same commandment is repeated in Deuteronomy: “Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a sabbath of the Lord your God; you shall not do any work... your ox or your ass, or any of your cattle.” Hertz comments: “Care and kindness to cattle are of such profound importance for the humanizing of man that this duty has its place in the Decalogue.”

Novak comments: “In rabbinical law this extends to riding on them, not just ‘working’ them in the strict agricultural sense.” Nor are animals to be slaughtered for food on the day of rest. Nevertheless, because a Jew is responsible for the well-being of his or her animals, they are to be fed on the Sabbath and, if necessary, to be milked so as not to suffer pain. “To indicate that this is for their sake and not our own, the milk taken from them is not to be used by us.”
Yet another example of the Bible's concern for animals' welfare is the commandment: “You shall not muzzle an ox while it is threshing.” 144

3) Vegetarianism

Vegetarianism is an issue which was debated by leading Jewish scholars well before the emergence of modern environmentalism. We will discuss this below.

4) Shehitah

Shehitah, ritual slaughter, is a subject on which much has been written: it has been under attack from animal protectionists for a long time. Gordis, however, points out that shehitah is “designed to keep alive the sense of reverence for life by forbidding the eating of blood and by minimizing the pain of the animal when it is slaughtered.” 145

Leading American vegetarian activist Richard Schwartz, claims that, in the Bible, meat-eating is connected with human lust. This idea is supported by the laws of shehitah which “implied a reprimand and served as an elaborate apparatus designed to keep alive a sense of reverence for life, with the aim of eventually leading people away from their meat eating habit.” 146

The late Sephardi Chief Rabbi of Israel, Benzion Meir Uziel, refers in a responsum to the request of animal protectionists to apply stunning by electroshock prior to the slaughter of animals. He forbids this. One reason he gives is that he does not believe that the Divine commandment of ritual slaughter causes suffering in animals, because it must be carried out according to a lengthy list of very precise rules. He believes that those who kill an animal in other ways make it suffer. 147

From these various sources it becomes clear that the Jew’s rights with regard to what he could do with or to animals were restricted long before such awareness emerged in Western society’s mainstream.

Sacrifices

Animals to be sacrificed were brought into the Tabernacle, which was established when the Jews crossed the desert after the Exodus from Egypt. Their ritual was regulated by a series of complex Halakhot. 148 These also governed the sacrifices brought later to the temple in Jerusalem. Sacrifices ended with the Romans’ destruction of the Second Temple in 70 C.E., and have been supplanted by prayer.

The ancient sacrifices stand in opposition to the concepts of the modern animal welfare movement. The classical Jewish vision is
different, as it sees in the animal’s sacrifice an act of obedience to God as well as atonement for sins, which takes priority over the animal’s survival. The Hebrew word for the sacrifice korban, from the root ‘to bring near’, is considered by some to reflect the idea that the sacrifice brings man nearer to God. Classical Jewish commentators have looked for a rationale of the sacrifices. Maimonides writes that God ordered the Jews to bring sacrifices as this was the common type of worship in those days. Maimonides mainly sees in the sacrifices a necessary tool for reaching God’s goal. He points out that the frequency of sacrifices—and places where they were permitted to take place—were very limited in comparison to prayer and supplication to God, which are permitted anywhere at any time.

Another law which tends to draw environmental objections is: “If a man has carnal relations with a beast, he shall be put to death; and you shall kill the beast. If a woman approaches any beast to mate with it, you shall kill the woman and the beast; they shall be put to death—their bloodguilt is upon them.”

The Mishnah asks: if man has sinned, what is the guilt of the animal? Two answers are given: the first is that it has caused man to sin; the second is that the animal should be prevented from going into the market or the public space, because people will say “This is the animal on whose account that specific man has been put to death by stoning.” In the Talmud the argument is developed further.

In his discussion on the quality of Jewish morality, Shubert Spero finds it a difficult text to explain. He considers the best explanation to be that “if the unfortunate beast is permitted to remain in the community, it serves as a constant reminder of the ugly incident, with its implied shame and indignity for man.”

The following Biblical text also seems ‘difficult’: “But every firstling ass you shall redeem with a sheep; if you do not redeem it, you must break its neck.” Hertz’s comment indicates that the latter would never occur: “This requirement ensured the scrupulous execution of the law of redemption in regard to unclean animals, as every one would prefer parting with a lamb to losing an ass.”

The motif of executing animals also appears in other Bible texts; for instance: “When an ox gores a man or a woman to death, the ox shall be stoned to death and its flesh shall not be eaten, but the owner of the ox is not to be punished.” The Hertz commentary sheds additional light on the hierarchical position of man and animal: “In order to implant horror against murder, even the beast, although it had not a moral sense, was to be removed from existence, since
it was the cause of the destruction of a human being, made in the image of God." 159

e) Sub-category: Constancy of species

In the Torah, mention is made twice of the concept of kilayim—perhaps best translated as 'mixture': "You shall not let your cattle mate with a different kind; you shall not sow your field with two kinds of seed; you shall not put on cloth from a mixture of two kinds of material." 160 And "You shall not sow your vineyard with a second kind of seed, else the crop — from the seed you have sown — and the yield of the vineyard may not be used. You shall not plow with an ox and an ass together. You shall not wear cloth combining wool and linen." 161

As mentioned earlier, this law has been included in the category of hukkim. Its interpretation has raised difficulties. Various classical commentators have explained the text by stating that man is forbidden to improve Divine creation through the introduction of new species of animals or seeds. 162 It is an approach with which some environmentalist currents may have an affinity, as they believe that man alters nature too much.

Some Talmudic sources claim that the prohibition of kilayim is among the Noachide laws and, as such, is applicable to all people. Sages from the house of Menashe exclude some of the commonly accepted commandments from this body of laws; it is interesting however, that they include not only ever min habai, but also prohibitions of kilayim and castration. 163 Rabbi Elazar also includes the prohibition of kilayim in the Noachide laws; he specifies, however, that this refers only to the mixed mating of animals and mixed grafting, not to mixed sowing or the wearing of certain fabrics. 164

Several new genetic engineering techniques are currently providing new challenges to the issue of constancy of species. Norman Solomon, one of the few modern Jewish writers to refer to this issue, is doubtful about the contribution that religion can make to determining ethics in this field, despite the fact that Judaism "has a distinct contribution to make to medical ethics." He states: "it has yet to be shown that traditional sources can be brought to bear other than in the vaguest way ('we uphold the sanctity of life') on the problems raised even by currently available genetic engineering." 165

f) Sub-category: sustainable cities

In contemporary Jewish literature singling out classical environmental attitudes, a frequently-quoted subject is the Levite cities. The Torah mentions 48 cities which, with their surrounding land, were
given to the Levites. This tribe lived off tithes it received, and devoted itself to God's service.

The Levites had the right to live in specific cities which were spread over the territories of other tribes: "Instruct the Israelite people to assign, out of the holdings apportioned to them, towns for the Levites to dwell in; you shall also assign to the Levites pasture land around their towns. The towns shall be theirs to dwell in, and the pasture shall be for the cattle they own and all their other beasts. The town pasture that you are to assign to the Levites shall extend a thousand cubits outside the town wall all around. You shall measure off two thousand cubits outside the town on the east side, two thousand on the south side, two thousand on the west side, and two thousand on the north side, with the town in the center. That shall be pasture for their towns." 166

Rashi explained this commandment in the sense that the open space was important from the point of view of urban planning. 167 He held that the prescribed open space around the city served to beautify it. It was forbidden to build houses there, plant vineyards, or till fields.

This approach is a precursor of modern town planning attitudes which try to apply strict ratios between built-up and open spaces.

Cities of refuge

Six of the Levite cities were also made available for those seeking refuge. A person guilty of manslaughter could flee to one of these: "The towns that you assign to the Levites shall comprise the six cities of refuge that you are to designate for a manslayer to flee to, to which you shall add forty-two towns. Thus the total of the towns that you assign to the Levites shall be forty-eight towns, with their pasture." 168 Avengers could not pursue the manslayer into these cities. The manslayer had to stay there until the high priest died, after which he was free to leave.

The city of refuge fulfilled many requirements which would now be considered as part of the sustainable city concept. Emmanuel Levinas analyzes a Talmud text on this subject, and outlines both environmental and other aspects of the refuge city. 169 He stresses how much importance Jewish tradition attached to assuring the quality of life for the involuntary murderer in these cities. The refuge towns had to be medium-sized cities with independent water supply and markets. 170

In the Talmud there are also several references which express a negative attitude toward cities, some of which have a halakhic meaning. 171 I referred to one of these above when mentioning that
a man cannot force his wife to move from a middle-sized town to a large one. Daniel Elazar claims that the Bible "does not celebrate urban civilization in the manner of the Greeks and Romans. At the same time it is not anti-city per se. As in all things, however, it is realistic about cities and does not romanticize them." 172

**g) Sub-category: Shabbat legislation**

Many Halakhot refer to the Shabbat. Some are acts of sanctification; others are prohibitions, the main one relating to work. This definition of work refers to those categories which were used in the construction of the Tabernacle.

Shabbat has become one of the hallmarks of Judaism. On Shabbat, for instance, observant Jews do not construct buildings, operate businesses or work machinery. Neither do they carry money, sell or purchase anything, make or extinguish fires, put lights on or off, drive a car, smoke etc. The list of Shabbat regulations which potentially impact on the environmentally relevant behavior of the observant Jew on that day is too long to be listed. The Shabbat laws are so incisive in the life of Jews that several scholars have asked what their environmental meaning is. A number of interpretations have been proffered.

Well before environmentalism became a mainstream interest, Abraham J. Heschel refers to the meaning of Shabbat in modern society with its ambiguous characteristics of technical civilization, whose forces seem to dominate man rather than being dominated by him.

"Is our civilization a way to disaster, as many of us are prone to believe?" he asks. He adds that humanity is proud of its "victories in the war with nature... landl of the abundance of commodities we have been able to produce. Yet our victories have come to resemble defeats." 173

"The Sabbath is the day on which we learn the art of surpassing civilization" is Heschel's answer. On that day many of the tools of modern society, which have become idols to be used easily for destruction, are set aside. He concludes: "is there any institution that holds out greater hope for man's progress than the Sabbath." As mentioned in Chapter Two, his pupil David Novak has developed this argument further when discussing nuclear war.

Ismar Schorsch, Chancellor of the Jewish Theological Seminary, considers that the role of the Shabbat is to humble man: "With its incessant strictures against work, Shabbat reminds man of his earthly status as tenant and not overlord. To rest is to acknowledge our limitations. One day out of seven we cease to exercise our power to tinker and transform. Wilful inactivity is a statement of subservience to a power greater than our own." 174
From this Schorsch concludes that, while man can make the planet unfit for habitation, either through accidents or through continual destructive actions, Shabbat limits our activities, thus reminding us that we have to be responsible. He adds: “More immediately, how salutary for the environment if one day a week we turned off the engines to walk rather than drive, to cultivate our inner lives, to relate to family and friends. How much cleaner the air is in Jerusalem on Shabbat!”

Indeed, on Shabbat the observant Jew is limited to where his legs can take him: he cannot even go more than a certain distance beyond the town borders. He cannot travel on this day-off, and his car does not consume non-renewable fuel resources, the burning of which has a polluting effect.

The 1973 oil crisis created a new perspective on the Shabbat Halakhot. The Arab oil boycott, and the resulting fear of the scarcity of oil, induced the Israeli government – like many others – to forbid citizens to use their car one day a week, in order to conserve petrol resources. It then became even more evident that there was a sizable part of the population which already abstained from using cars on one day a week, for religious reasons.

More interpretations

Novak also refers to the relationship between Shabbat and technology. He claims that, while the Jew does not do any forbidden work on the Shabbat, he does not have to stop automated technology, as long as it does not require his intervention. He believes Shabbat observance to teach that a limit should be put on technology, but it should not be crippled or renounced.

Artson uses his interpretation of Shabbat’s meaning to prove that mankind is not the purpose of Creation: “Nor are we the Creation’s pinnacle; recall that the Sabbath Day is created after humanity. We exist to make the world sacred and decent. A part of creation we are also apart of creation.”

Opposing Sunday deregulation

The same motif emerges in statements by British Chief Rabbi Jonathan Sacks. Explaining why both he and his predecessor, Lord Jakobovits, oppose the proposed laws for Sunday deregulation, Sacks stresses that this is despite the fact that the religious members of their community, in particular, stand to benefit from it: “The Jewish Sabbath – Saturday – is a day on which we may neither work nor buy or sell and this carries with it significant disadvantages in a society in which Saturday is the principal shopping day... It meant that some individuals would find it easier to gain employment, since they were will-
ing to work on Sunday but not on Saturday. In terms of interests, therefore, the change in the law clearly benefited Jews...” 178

Sacks opposes Sunday trading because it would take from society its day of rest, the day on which one person could not force others to work, a day from which everybody benefits – irrespective of whether he is religious or not. He adds that the Biblical Shabbat was instituted by Judaism and has been adapted in a slightly different form by others because: “It was a time when relationships of power or exchange were suspended, when we were valued for what we were, not for what we owned or could buy.” It is not difficult to recognize here motifs which are also expressed in attacks by modern environmentalism on consumer society. 179

However, if analyzed from the viewpoint of an environmental impact assessment, the Shabbat laws are revealed as not entirely pro-environment. Many observant Jews put on some lights before Shabbat and let them burn for the entire time; the same goes for heating and cooking appliances. This can lead to a greater use of energy than would otherwise have been the case. To some extent, this counteracts the natural resources saved on the Shabbat, such as not using one’s car. (However, others use pre-set electric clocks to regulate the start and closure of lights and appliances during the Shabbat.)

This comes as an important reminder to the more apologetic voices, who would like to consider Halakha entirely pro-environment. A more correct definition, however, is that Halakha is the religious law for Jewish civil society and, as such, it focuses elsewhere.

The laws of the High Holidays and the holidays relevant to the environment are largely similar to the Shabbat laws. Specific laws with respect to the seven-day Sukkot holiday recall the 40 years of wandering in the desert after the Exodus. Jews commemorate a past that was closer to nature by living in the sukkah, a structure whose roof is covered with natural material, through which one must able to see the sky. The religious meaning, however, is remembering God’s favors on the occasion of the Exodus.

The other holidays, Pesach and Shavuot, also recall the people’s link with nature. On Pesach, the first fruits of the spring barley crop were brought to the Temple. On Shavuot, two loaves of bread from the first wheat crop were brought as part of the festival offering. The Halakhot emphasize a central message: nature is not an independent entity, but an instrument of God.

h) Sub-category: Dietary laws

Kashrut, the dietary laws, are another hallmark of observant Jews. They govern issues such as which animals may be eaten, how they
need to be slaughtered and prepared, and the avoidance of eating meat and milk products together.

The *kashrut* laws are considered to be primarily ritual ones. For this reason, aspects of these laws which may now be considered of environmental relevance have hardly been given attention by modern Jewish writers. Some of the observations made with respect to Shabbat could also be applied here: abstaining from certain foods because of Divine prohibitions helps people to see consumption as a responsible act, rather than limitless indulgence.

A similar argument can be made with respect to the Jewish fast days. Foregoing food on these days puts additional limits on consumption, and changes one's perspective. So does the prohibition from eating leavened food during the seven days of Passover.

Some modern non-Orthodox writers wish to modify kashrut to reflect modern environmental considerations. This 'eco-*kashrut*', however, has no roots in halakhic thinking.

*The nazirite*

The Jewish tradition knows a special case, already detailed in the Torah, of a *nazirite*, a person who vows to consecrate himself to God for a certain period of time. This vow has three main elements: abstinence from certain foods, not shaving one's hair, and avoidance of contact with dead bodies.

The dietary aspects of this concern grape products: "he shall abstain from wine and any other intoxicant; he shall not drink vinegar of wine or of any other intoxicant, neither shall he drink anything in which grapes have been steeped, nor eat grapes fresh or dried. Throughout his term as nazirite, he may not eat anything that is obtained from the grapevine, even seeds or skin." 181

At the end of his period of abstention, the nazirite has to present a number of offerings. One of these is a sin-offering, which – according to one interpretation – indicates that the Torah frowns on those who go beyond Halakha and deny themselves what is not forbidden.

The Babylonian Talmud quotes a *baraaita* from R. Elazar Hakappar, who states that whoever denies himself permitted things, as the nazirite does, is a sinner. In his commentary Adin Steinsalz mentions other such sinners, including those who impose additional fast days upon themselves. 182, 183

The idea of abstinence also appears in modern environmental writing. 184 One may assume that those environmentalists who favor this would look positively on a nazirite. Judaism, however, does not necessarily view abstention beyond the expressly forbidden as a preferable way of life. (This argument also permeates the discussion
on the Jewish attitude toward vegetarianism, see below.) However, a current of asceticism does exist in Judaism, and was particularly evident in the Middle Ages.  

II. Halakha and Contemporary Environmental Issues

It is generally assumed that Halakha has given relatively little attention to environmental issues in the past decades. Little is yet known about the instances where these matters have been dealt with, as no bibliography of contemporary Halakha exists. Nonetheless, the questions which occupied generations before the emergence of the industrial/consumer society have continued to evolve. For example, contemporary halakhic responsa may deal with modern types of nuisance.

Smoking

One subject which has received attention in recent years, however, is smoking and passive smoking. This is particularly so since scientific data on its link with cancer have been confirmed. (Doing harm to oneself by smoking is not usually considered an environmental matter, although passive smoking is.) As this is predominantly a health issue, it also falls within the field of contemporary medical Halakha. The latter has enjoyed much more contemporary rabbinical interest than environmental Halakha per se.

Responsa opposing smoking go back four hundred years. One important 19th century rabbinical authority, the Chafetz Chayim, considers that five transgressions are involved in smoking: injuring oneself, not taking care of one’s soul diligently, and wasting time, Torah study, and money.

Among contemporary authorities, there is an halakhic ruling by Rabbi Moshe Feinstein that forbids smoking in public places. He also explicitly forbids the smoking of marijuana.

David Novak discusses the difference between the use of marijuana and alcohol. He concludes that the latter has undergone an “historical process of socialization and sanctification”. By contrast, marijuana use has not only not undergone such a process but has also “become the symbol of a whole drug culture, a culture based on the hedonistic imperative, ‘If it feels good, do it!’ Can anything be more antithetical to Judaism, with all its emphasis on sacrifice and discipline?”

Other rulings have been issued against smoking by the late Sephardi Chief Rabbi of Tel Aviv, Chayim David Halevi, as well as Eliezer Waldenberg. Recently, spiritual leaders such as Israel’s for-
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mer Sephardi Chief Rabbi Ovadia Yosef and the Bostoner Rebbe Levi Yitzhak Horowitz have also urged Jews to stop smoking.\(^{195}\)

In various responsa, Halevi refers to other aspects of smoking. In one of these, he concludes that when a son is asked to purchase cigarettes for his father, he must not do so.\(^{196}\) If the son sees the father smoking, he must politely warn him not only of the health risks, but also that he is transgressing a divine commandment.\(^ {197}\)

In another responsum, Halevi is asked whether rabbis can release from his vow a person who has sworn not to smoke. His position is that a rabbinical court cannot release him from the vow, because smoking is forbidden for health reasons.\(^ {198}\)

The rabbinical authorities do not view the rulings on smoking as part of the environmental debate. They concern one specific issue which comes under the broad category of health protection. As scientific knowledge about the dangers of smoking increases, some halakhic authorities have felt the need to refer to it.

To illustrate the complexity, the state-of-the-art and the lack of central authority in Halakha today: one finds even among ultra-Orthodox rabbinical scholars quite a few heavy smokers. (As smoking on Shabbat is forbidden, this diminishes enjoyment of the day for many of them.)

*Animal experimentation and fur coats*

Another contemporary issue to which some halakhic attention has been given is animal experimentation. R. Yechiel Ya’akov Weinberg, a 20th century rabbinical authority, permits these activities, stating that the elimination of human pain and suffering are more important than the prevention of animal pain.

Eliezer Waldenberg also deems medical experimentation permissible, while also stressing that efforts must be made to minimize the animals’ pain.\(^ {199}\) In his view, medical or economic purposes override the prohibitions of both bal tashhit and za’ar ba’alei hayyim. Other rabbinical authorities have discussed this subject and have reached different conclusions.\(^ {200}\)

A few years ago, the wearing of fur coats led a concerned Israeli to put a halakhic question to Halevi.\(^ {201}\) The person posing the question wrote that he had attended a concert of religious cantors in Tel Aviv, where several women in the audience were wearing fur coats. Demonstrators outside the hall staged a protest against the wearing of fur. The questioner was surprised by the respective stances taken in the argument: the mainly religious concert-goers defended the practice, while the non-religious demonstrators stressed the issue of za’ar ba’alei hayyim.
He wrote: “Initially, also I sided with the opinion of the concert-goers that everything God created in his world was created for man, and thus man is allowed to hunt thousands of animals in order to dress. But my second thought was: is it permissible to kill thousands of animals because a woman wants an expensive fur? If they had worn woolen coats, they would have been equally warm.”

In his answer, Halevi analyzes the Torah’s attitude to animals. He states that this subject has an ideological-moral importance because God, who created man, also created the animals. Halevi states that many of the Torah’s commandments underline its positive attitude toward animals. He adds that rabbinical decisions permit hunting for eating only, but not for enjoyment. Even those rabbis who allow hunting for furs do so only if the animal is killed fast, without suffering. Halevi writes that he has verified with an expert in the field that animals are often caught in very painful ways. He adds, that even if the animal is needed for medical purposes one may only use it provided it is caused as little pain as possible. In light of this, Halevi concludes that killing animals “in a painful way in order to beautify and warm oneself with their skins” is forbidden.

As mentioned in Chapter One, Ovadia Yosef condemns bullfights in a responsum: “The bullfight is in total contradiction to the spirit of our holy Torah. It is an expression of the culture of sinners and cruel people which Jews should not be.” Yosef stresses that za’ar ba’alei hayyim is a very serious prohibition. He adds: “Whoever goes to the stadium to watch bullfighting and pays an entrance fee is an associate of destructive people and helps those who transgress.”

Vegetarianism

In past decades, there has been some discussion on the Jewish attitude toward vegetarianism. This is a complex matter with many halakhic sources, which have been reviewed by Bleich. He mentions that, in the past, there were indeed pious individuals who did not eat meat. However, he claims that many of these did so not out of ethical considerations, but because they were afraid that the lax standards of supervision of the Jewish dietary laws would make them transgress. He mentions in this category orthodox immigrants to the United States in the early years of the century.

Another group who preferred not to eat meat were some medieval scholars. They regarded “vegetarianism as a moral ideal, not because of a concern for the welfare of animals, but because of the fact that the slaughter of animals might cause the individual who performs such acts to develop negative character traits, viz., meanness and
cruelty. Their concern was with regard to possible untoward effect upon human character rather than with animal welfare.  

Bleich also refers to the writings of Rabbi Kook, who is often quoted on this subject. Kook speaks of vegetarianism as an ideal and notes that Adam did not eat meat. However, according to Bleich, Kook makes those comments with reference to the Messianic era, when humanity will again live in a way similar to Paradise.

Bleich states that those who find meat consumption repugnant are expressing an aesthetic rather than a moral response. Such aesthetic vegetarianism is not incompatible with Jewish teaching. While Judaism does not command the eating of meat, it doesn't see in vegetarianism a moral ideal.

He adds that there are several recommendations in classical Jewish literature to eat meat on Jewish festivals, as it adds to their festive character. He concludes, “even if there is no normative obligation to partake of meat on Yom Tov (religious festivals), abstaining from meat on Yom Tov because of considerations of vegetarianism would not have been looked upon with favor by the Sages.”

R. Schwartz points out Rabbi Kook’s stance that God allows humans to eat meat as a concession to human weakness, and considers vegetarianism preferable. Rabbi Kook himself seldom ate meat. Schwartz notes Kook’s explanation that God allowed Noah’s sons to eat meat because “they had sunk to an extremely low level of spirituality” and unable to restrain their lust, may have eaten human flesh. While Schwartz does not claim to be a scholar in the Jewish field, his book Judaism and Vegetarianism has received rabbinical endorsement from Shaar Yashuv Cohen, the Chief Rabbi of Haifa.

The former chief rabbi of Ireland, David Rosen – another vegetarian – considers that eating meat today is halakhically forbidden. He writes: “The current treatment of animals in the livestock trade definitely renders the consumption of meat halakhically unacceptable as the product of illegitimate means.” The issue of whether elements of contemporary meat breeding and slaughtering affect the kashrut of a variety of meat products is an important one, and merits further halakhic discussion. Rosen has already reached his own conclusions.

In discussing man’s relationship with nature, Lamm also reflects on vegetarianism: “The Torah’s respect for non-human nature is evident in the restrictions that follow immediately upon the ‘subdue’ commandment: man is permitted only to eat herbs and greens, not to abuse the resources of nature. Vegetarianism yields to carnivorousness only after the Flood when, as a concession God permits the
eating of meat to the sons of Noah. Even then, the right to devour flesh is circumscribed with a number of protective prohibitions, such as the warnings against eating blood and taking human life. The laws of kashrut preserve the kernel of that primeval vegetarianism by placing selective restrictions on man's appetite for meat. His right to “subdue” nature is by no means unlimited.

R. Schwartz stresses that God's initial dietary law is a vegetarian one: “I have given you every herb yielding seed which is upon the face of the earth, and every tree, which is yielding seed – to you it shall be for food.” He notes that manna, a non-meat food, was the preferred food in the desert.

Nachmanides writes that man was initially commanded to keep a vegetarian diet because “living creatures possess a moving soul and a certain spiritual authority which in this respect make them similar to those who possess intellect (people) and they have the power of affecting their welfare and their food and they flee from pain and death.”

However, Alfred S. Cohen, an orthodox rabbi, asks: “Is it not presumptuousness bordering on blasphemy, to call an act sanctioned by the Torah (and perhaps mandated by Halakha) an act of cruelty, of inhumanity?” He states that, for this very reason, vegetarianism as an ideology must be rejected by the observant Jew. However, he quotes Jonathan Wolf: “All the reasons that people become vegetarians are Jewish reasons.” It may be noted that some leading rabbinical scholars in this century have been vegetarians.

To conclude, vegetarianism is one example of authorities generally basing their arguments on the same sources, yet reaching a range of diverse conclusions.

Halevi's responsa

Other contemporary issues in the environmental sphere are referred to in Halevi's responsa. He is asked whether the destruction of surplus food in order to stabilize prizes is permitted. Halevi concludes that it is preferable to give the surplus away to poor people who certainly cannot afford to buy it. If this is impossible or there is no need for it, it is not forbidden to destroy the food “in a respectful way.”

In this responsum, Halevi issues a warning that one should not throw unpackaged sweets or peeled nuts among the congregants on the occasion of a wedding or bar mitzvah, because much of this is broken and thus becomes inedible.

Another question addressed to Halevi deals with the use of foodstuffs in any way that makes them unfit for consumption and leads
to their being thrown away (for instance, cutting vegetables and painting them, the sticking of vegetables as a decoration in paintings, or the use of flour for making glue). Halevi considers this an unworthy use of food; it is forbidden if there is a suitable substitute.  

In another responsum, Halevi considers whether it is permitted to keep pets in a cage or fish in an aquarium. He says that this is not forbidden, as man learns from looking at their behavior. The same goes for a zoo. One even gains an occasion to say a blessing praising God for his creation if one sees unusual animals.

In the past, the rabbinical authorities did not consider there to be any prohibition if the animals’ needs are provided for. Ovadia Yosef also says that going to the zoo is permitted, because it causes man to be impressed by God’s creation.  

A questioner tells Halevi that he has learned from studying Maimonides that it is permitted to cut down a tree that does not bear fruit, even if he has no need for it; he understands from this that Maimonides considers these trees “not useful and unimportant.” He asks whether the Halakha has changed today “in view of the fact that ecological scientists have discovered that trees are important in the production of oxygen.”  

Halevi answers that Halakha never changes. “God who has given the Torah knew everything and sees everything ahead of time.” Even if a clear scientific discovery is made which contradicts a certain Halakha “we will try with all our force to explain it and if we do not find an explanation we will decide that our intelligence is too weak to understand it [i.e. the Halakha].” However, Halevi interprets the Maimonides ruling in a very complex way; when there is no useful purposes, he scarcely differentiates between the tree without fruit and the fruit-bearing tree. From there he concludes that “the unnecessary cutting of trees that do not bear fruit is not permitted. That is the Halakha and it is in line with scientists’ claim that trees which do not bear fruit are also important.”

Other contemporary issues

Another contemporary Israeli halakhic discussion deals with the complaint of one agricultural settlement against the other: their quality of life is badly affected by field irrigation with water from a sewage-contaminated reservoir close to their house. The method of irrigation through sprinkling causes a strong odor. The accused settlement claims that stopping this will cause them major economic loss.

Hosea Rabinowitsch rejects the complainants’ claim. He poses the argument that the reservoir was specifically built to collect both rain
and sewage water for irrigation purposes, and that the damage or nuisance caused by the irrigation is infrequent. In addition, if no law of the country is infringed, there is no way to make a claim. Furthermore, even if nuisance has been caused, stopping the irrigation cannot be enforced, due to the subsequent economic losses that the accused settlement would suffer. Nonetheless, the latter must make an effort to reduce the hindrance to a minimum. Yosef Gavriel Backhofer enquires whether recycling is a commandment, and whether those who do not follow it transgress bal tashhit. He believes that if one recycles, one gains the reward of following the bal tashhit commandment, but there is no active commandment. There is no prohibition against destroying an object if the cost of ‘saving’ it would exceed its value. Adhering to bal tashhit in such a case has prevented gain, but no destruction has been caused. If all one has to do, however, is to sort waste and bring it to a collection point close to one’s home, throwing it elsewhere might be considered destruction. Ovadia Yosef has issued a responsum with respect to laying flowers on a coffin. This is a problem of adopting non-Jewish habits as well as transgressing bal tashhit. He replies that it was a custom in Talmudic times, and also among Egyptian Jews, to put spices and myrtle branches on top of coffins. To avoid transgressing bal tashhit, he recommends using only inexpensive wreaths.

A responsum where environmentalism and Judaism seemingly meet for totally different reasons concerns the use of disposable cups for kiddush, the ritual blessing over the wine on Shabbat and holidays. Feinstein rules that a kiddush cup should be nice and unblemished. A disposable cup does not meet these criteria and is not worthy for this purpose. He adds the proviso that, perhaps when there is no other cup available, it might be used.

Thus contemporary Halakhic rulings do exist on some environmental matters. However, they are dispersed over many sources in many places, and it seems difficult – if not impossible – to draw any overall conclusion from these scattered responsa.

III. Expanding Environmental Halakha

The idea that the corpus of Halakha, with its multiple rules and precedents, could be substantially extended to deal with contemporary environmental issues, is occasionally raised in modern publications.

Focusing on the law of bal tashhit, Helfand suggests that a number of environmental issues be looked at. “Based on this analysis, numer-
ous common practices must come under scrutiny as possible violations. For example, it seems most likely that the pollution of waters by the use of detergents, especially those containing phosphates which upset the ecological balance and kill fish, is in violation of bal tashhit. "The same statement can be made about all activities that produce or cause harmful pollution, e.g. the use of leaded gasoline, the operation of inefficient incinerators, the dumping of factory and other waste, and the like. By further extension, the law might even include the purchase and disposal of all non-recyclable material within its jurisdiction." 234

Novak wishes to extend bal tashhit to encompass nuclear war. He believes that this law teaches us that we must not destroy our enemies unconditionally and that, similarly, one must not destroy one's environment unconditionally. "This is certainly the case in a situation like the nuclear threat today, where our destruction of somebody else's environment would inevitably entail the destruction of our own environment. Indeed, even without the actual use of nuclear weapons, we have painfully seen from the ecological devastation wrought by Saddam Hussein and his Iraqi troops in the Persian Gulf in 1991 that Iraq itself did not escape its horrible effects." 235

Quite a similar position on nuclear war was taken earlier by Louis Jacobs, without explicit reference to Halakha: "If the sole justification of war is to defend life, if the result of the war will be the eventual destruction of the defenders themselves as well as the attackers, such a war would be forbidden... Now if nations ever engaged in large-scale nuclear warfare it would be the end of civilization as we know it: millions of innocent human beings will be destroyed and the whole future of the human race placed in peril. In these circumstances there can be no justification for initiating nuclear warfare." 236

The potential of Halakha for dealing with current environmental issues goes far beyond the few examples quoted in the literature. Occasionally Jewish writers have debated how a Jewish state would function, in which the religious commandments would all be operational. In such a state, the basic environmental issues of our times would be decided according to Jewish law. However, this subject raised more interest in the founding years of the state than it does today.

A trial ground for Halakha's development potential?

The codified system of Halakha has a history of over 2,000 years, based on rules and precedents. Rabbis have defined priorities in conflicting situations using legal, pragmatic and value considerations.
Applying the organically-expanded rules of such a system to contemporary environmental issues, where both value and pragmatic judgments have to be made, may yield Judaism's most important contribution in this field. This holds further importance for Orthodox Judaism, which must start to substantiate its claim that a modern state can function according to Halakha. For a variety of reasons, an area such as environmental legislation might provide a strategic trial ground for this.

Israel is behind the Western world in its environmental practice. Developing halakhic concepts could show that, on the domestic front, Halakha is able to confront complex modern problems not only incidentally, but also systematically. Due to the low environmental awareness in Israel, serious controversies are unlikely while halakhic experts rule on solutions to problems. (As only those who accept these halakhic rulings will be affected by them, and the general public is as yet unlikely to show much interest, the field could develop relatively undisturbed.)

The extant corpus of Halakha has been continuously developed in order to apply it to new cases. The contemporary proposals for further extension, such as 'eco-kashrut', are totally beyond the realm of organic Halakhic development. These are attempts to bring concepts into Judaism which have no roots in Jewish law.

Dealing with concrete problems

Why has so little been written on the potential development of Halakha in the environmental field? Several reasons may be considered. Firstly, most of the important contemporary halakhic scholars live in Israel, a country where many Western environmental concerns are not shared by large parts of the population, including many of the Orthodox. The communities that turn for guidance to halakhic scholars are concerned with issues of more personal relevance. Contemporary Halakha deals mainly with practical problems rather than potential ones. This is probably why environmental Halakha has developed much less than medical Halakha (for example).

Apparently, observant Jews are not particularly concerned with environmental issues from a personal viewpoint. They also seem to accept that these matters should be regulated by the general laws of the country concerned. (At first sight, these environmental laws also do not seem to conflict with Jewish laws.)

The limited interest of contemporary Jewish writers in environmental issues may also explain why so few suggestions for halakhic examination of possible subjects have come from modern publications. Several writers who are seriously interested in environmental
issues are not familiar with the halakhic system; others do not accept it and largely invent for themselves what is Jewish. Again, others are more interested in abstract ethical discussions than practical regulations.

Applying Halakha to modern society’s problems

In view of the importance of environmental issues in modern society, it is desirable for Judaism to develop Halakhot in this field. Besides halakhic decisions based on precedents, an important role may be played by *takkanot* (enactments). These are decisions that rabbinical authorities make in the public interest.

In the past, several such *takkanot* have dealt with hygiene. One is the *takkana* to wash hands before eating, which is said in the Talmud to have been introduced by King Solomon. The point was to encourage one to clean one’s hands from ritual impurity prior to eating certain foods. The *takkana* was later extended, and today, observant Jews wash their hands and say a blessing before partaking of a meal which includes bread.\(^{230}\)

Ezra the scribe instituted another *takkana*, ordering that clothes be washed on Thursday. His aim was both religious and hygienic: to honor Shabbat with clean clothes.\(^{240}\)

One outcome of such an extended halakhic approach in the future will be that a Jewish position may be heard when governments make major environmental decisions. The viewpoints of rabbinical experts may also provide additional perspectives on current Western rulings, public policies and laws derived from activist pressure.

Potential for future development

Much systematic work needs to be done in defining on which environmental issues halakhic scholars could develop a body of contemporary Halakha. There are two possible approaches to this matter. One is that, one day, halakhic scholars may find environmental Halakha of interest, acquire specialized knowledge in this field, and start developing Halakha further. Another is that environment-concerned citizens will start to pose halakhic questions in relation to the subject, and will find rabbinical authorities willing to study and answer these questions.

The latter may be the beginning of a long process. There is a potential problem in putting complex environmental questions to rabbis who are unfamiliar with the field. This may initially yield some poor results. However, the point is to get the process started. Thereafter, know-how will increase and with this, the quality of the responsa will improve over the years. Once some rabbinical decision-
makers begin to specialize in the field, further advancement will be made.

**Expansion of Halakha and elements of environment**

A few examples are given below of questions (A-D) which may serve as a basis for the expansion of Halakha, defining environmental rules according to its principles. I have grouped these questions according to various environmental concerns, as the following table shows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Halakhic Question</th>
<th>Environmental Relevance</th>
<th>Question</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Extended producer responsibility</td>
<td>pollution; conservation of natural resources</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responsibility for cleaning up ancient and hazardous waste sites</td>
<td>pollution</td>
<td>(A)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limiting polluting activities in view of relatively sensitive persons or cost/benefit considerations</td>
<td>pollution</td>
<td>A, B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Permissibility of nuclear war and those technological threats which cause global warming</td>
<td>broad; covers protection of natural resources, nature and pollution</td>
<td>C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Giving nations property rights over their genetic resources</td>
<td>relation with nature; protection of natural resources</td>
<td>D</td>
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**A) Producer responsibility**

A broad area of potential halakhic investigation concerns the issue of responsibility for cleaning up pollution. In Western society, one abstract principle is often stated: the polluter pays. In many situations, however, it is unclear who the polluter is. Today, it seems evident that somebody who throws an empty beer can in a forest is a polluter and should pay a fine – if he can be caught – because he has polluted a public place. If he throws a can into his private rubbish container, he should pay a fee to the municipality which picks up the rubbish and has to bear the costs of burial and landfill operations. If he puts it into a municipal recycling basket, the price obtained for the recycled material may cover the costs of the recycling process.
However, in various Western European societies there is much discussion and, on several occasions, application of the ‘extended producer responsibility’ principle. This forces manufacturers to take responsibility for the recycling or taking back of certain products at the end of their useful life.

This kind of law could be looked at from the halakhic point of view, and analyzed as to whether a halakhically acceptable formula could be found to help solve this problem. How would Halakha deal with such a question? Can a residual obligation for the seller be included in the original purchase agreement, thus enforcing him to take back the product for recycling at the end of its useful life?

Another controversial allocation of obligations is found in the U.S. Superfund Law. Under this retroactive law, the government may force any former owner to clean up a hazardous waste site, irrespective of whether he caused the pollution or not. One may ask whether this is equitable under Jewish law.

In the discussion at the 1998 Harvard Conference on Judaism and the Natural World, one participant referred to a related case in the United States. A conflict arose between a gas-emitting plant and the neighboring community regarding how much pollution needed to be reduced. Corporate interests claimed that it should reach a level where it would not affect those with regular health. Its opponents insisted that the emissions should not hinder those who were particularly sensitive (such as those with a tendency to asthma). A case like this can also be considered an extension of the examples of hindrances referred to in the responsa mentioned earlier in this chapter.

B) The value of life

Yet another problem which often preoccupies policy-makers may also be a potential subject for halakhic inquiry. Certain risks can be eliminated by investing substantial sums of money. So, for instance, many lives can be saved by the addition of new railways and travelers’ consequent move from private car to rail transport. Not only is the railway generally more environmentally-friendly, but it also causes fewer accidents per passenger-kilometer than the car.

Decisions often need to be made in society as to which risks should be prevented at what price. Often these decisions are taken without deep and careful thought. Laws are then established with certain costs for society. Analysis of this reveals that, while some laws save a life at a very modest price, others involve extremely high costs. As this is rather a taboo subject in Western society, little is published on it. 

Although little is made public about this, government policy-makers in some countries establish a maximum economic price to be
paid per life saved. This value is then factored into feasibility studies, for example, in relation to transport. Is such an approach compatible with Halakha? Are there Halakhic precedents for it in other areas, and has Halakha anything specific to say on the value of life? (A similar question may arise in the context of risk assessments of changing speed limits on highways.)

C) Risks associated with energy use

One far-reaching question to be asked is: If, in the coming years, the risk of global warming and related phenomena becomes more severe, does Halakha have anything to say about humanity's behavior and the range of technological threats which may gradually eliminate human life? This may be considered an extension of the question asked by Novak with respect to nuclear war.

Could one then claim that reducing the emission of man-made greenhouse-gases becomes a halakhic matter, in view of the protection of life on earth?

Norman Solomon, one of the few modern writers to refer to these problems, is of the opinion that Jewish sources have little to say on issues such as the choice between nuclear, fossil and other energy sources. He considers that the technical matters involved in energy production in relation to issues like environmental damage and sustainability require scientific research and "have nothing to do with theology." 242 This position is valid in today's reality where one can only speculate as to whether, in a halakhic state, rabbis would wish to get involved in such issues. Solomon adds: "The religious might perhaps have something to say about overall strategy. For instance, a religious viewpoint might suggest that scientists should pay more attention to find out how to use less energy to meet demands for goods than to finding out how to produce more energy. However, unless the religious are actually aiming to persuade people to demand fewer goods, such advice - viz. to seek more energy-efficient ways to do things - is merely the council of prudence, not dependent on any characteristically religious value." 243

Similarly, Solomon claims that decisions with regard to global warming should be based on prudence - of which he considers that all religious Jews hold a positive view - rather than religious values. He wonders, however, whether Halakha has anything to say on the conservation of natural resources that provide us with energy.

Diamond develops a scenario of how a halakhist might deal with the problem of global warming. The latter would "turn to Western leaders and say, 'Would you be willing to accept for yourselves the level of economic hardship that will be imposed on the developing
nations if they accept the levels of emissions control you are demanding. If not, you ought to be ready to compensate them for economic losses sustained as a result or to agree to shift more of the reductions to yourselves, given that you are more able to sustain such reductions financially." Diamond concludes: "It is always dangerous to speak in the name of others; nonetheless, I believe that such a response is a reasonable if not compelling extrapolation from halakhic sources." 244

In this context, it is important to develop further the position Halakha takes toward technologies with an environmental impact.

D) Property rights relating to animals and plants

Bio-diversity, another significant environmental concern, also has aspects of halakhic relevance. The Biodiversity Convention of 1992, which gives nations property rights over their genetic resources, may be analyzed in this light.

Enrichment of Halakha

Halakha is enriched by the study of these and other contemporary issues, and the development of a Jewish position in their regard. It also helps to prepare the ground for further halakhic decisions in other areas of modern society.

This proposed approach may be a long shot. Nonetheless, it can provide some direction for dealing with potential issues that may develop into problems in the future.

A Jewish problem: Halakha has to be developed organically to address modern issues. A worldwide political problem: A more coherent policy and legislative approach has to be developed in the environmental field.

IV. Halakha and Hierarchy

The previous analysis of environmental Halakhot outlines where Judaism broadly stands on environmental issues. It also indicates that it may be possible to develop parts of a hierarchical map, setting out how various environmental elements fit into the Jewish value system. Like many other issues, environmental matters have their own particular relevance and importance in Jewish law. However, they cannot be seen in isolation from the other elements of Judaism.

A hierarchical map would demonstrate the priorities in Jewish thought and, most particularly, how central service of God is. Classical Judaism sees obedience to God’s commandments as one of the Jew’s main roles.
The observant Jew's life is ruled by Divine commandments. While he may transgress on almost all Divine laws if in danger, he should surrender his life rather than commit idolatry.

Animals and plants are clearly inferior to man in the Jewish hierarchy. Nonetheless, the Jew may not do anything he wants with them. In the case of conflict of interest, one has to determine what takes precedence. In Judaism, Halakha determines such priorities. So, for instance, Lord Immanuel Jakobovits, former chief rabbi of Great Britain, stated that Halakha itself teaches the Jewish priority of values: when there is a conflict of values, it determines which are to prevail.

The latter concept remains largely abstract. A monolithic Halakha would be required to give a coherent picture. From this one could even develop a thinking model. One could feed all Halakhot and their argumentation into a computer program based on this model, and a map of halakhic hierarchies could be constructed from that. My main claim is less far-reaching, though: the hierarchical mapping of Halakha, while severely limited by its fragmentation, still can make a useful contribution to understanding the place of environmental issues in Judaism.

By systematically analyzing hierarchies in the various types of classical Jewish sources, a larger map of Jewish views on the environment can be established. This can then be summarized in an integrated manner. Once again, this would require substantial scholarly work.

One could study, for example, how rabbinical decisions have been reached on conflicts concerning issues of relevance to the environment. Similar hierarchical mapping on the ethical and theological aspects of classical Judaism will yield a more complete insight into the attitude of Judaism toward the environment.

A few selected examples will clarify this concept of hierarchical mapping as applied to Halakha.

a) A dramatic example of hierarchy concerns pikku'ah nefesh, the principle that life takes precedence over Jewish law. As mentioned, when one's life is in danger all religious commandments - with three exceptions - can be superseded. Novak explains the possible thought process behind the ruling that man must surrender his life rather than serve idols. "When directly confronted by idolatry, both Judaism and Christianity have insisted upon martyrdom... namely death becomes the only affirmation of God possible; it is the only symbol left for the human person to express existentially his or her ultimate concern."

b) While to be fruitful and multiply is a Divine commandment, the Talmud presents the opinion of the sage Resh Lakish that, in
times of hunger in the community, it is forbidden to have sexual intercourse.\textsuperscript{248}

c) Several insights can be obtained from the Halakhot concerning \textit{bal tashhit}. Maintaining fruit trees takes priority over the successful siege of cities; the latter supersedes maintaining trees that do not bear fruit. However, it was not permitted to even plant one type of tree, the \textit{asherah}. This is a sacred pole – i.e. a tree – dedicated to idolatry: “You shall not set up a sacred post – any kind of pole beside the altar of the Lord your God that you make.”\textsuperscript{249}

When the Israelites entered the land of Israel, they were to destroy all the places where the pagan gods were worshipped, including the \textit{asherah}: “You must destroy all the sites at which the nations you are to dispossess worshipped their gods, whether on lofty mountains and on hills or under any luxuriant tree. Tear down their altars, smash their pillars, put their sacred posts to the fire, and cut down the images of their gods, obliterating their name from that site.”\textsuperscript{250}

In one of Ovadia Yosef’s responsa on the tearing of one’s clothes when a family member has died, he says that this commandment takes precedence over the prohibition of \textit{bal tashhit}.\textsuperscript{251}

It has been noted in this study that Judaism generally opposes wanton destruction. Yet, in the case of the city tainted with idolatry it says: “Put the inhabitants of that town to the sword and put its cattle to the sword. Doom it and all that is in it to destruction: gather all its spoil into the open square, and burn the town and all its spoil as a holocaust to the Lord your God. And it shall remain an everlasting ruin, never to be rebuilt.” \textsuperscript{252}

The classical Jewish interpretation of the principle of ‘wanton destruction’, however, does not match that of modern environmentalists. There is no mention of such an action’s ever being executed by a Jewish authority, and several sages declared that such a city never existed, nor is likely to exist. However, the ideas embodied in this text provide another indication of Judaism’s priorities in the Bible, and their rabbinic interpretation.

The confrontation of economic and environmental interests in modern society has become a major conflict of values. Precursors of these tensions are already demonstrated in the classical Jewish sources, with some decisions on the application of \textit{bal tashhit} representing a hierarchy of values in this respect. The same is true for the buying-off of nuisances mentioned earlier.

d) The greatly debated text of Genesis 1:28 expresses a hierarchical concept. In the common Jewish view, its meaning is that man is superior to the animal and inanimate worlds. However, one cannot
conclude from that one text either the “right to wanton destruction of nature” or the “custodian concept.”

One may also read the story of Abraham’s sacrifice of his son Isaac as a hierarchical story. Man should not be sacrificed to God, but animals may. In pre-Jewish history, man brings animal sacrifices to God on his own initiative. Abel is the first and “the Lord paid heed to his offering.” Noah does the same and in this case, too, the sacrifice is well received.

When somebody is found murdered in open country, and the murderer’s identity is unknown, the elders of the nearest city break the neck of a young heifer in an uncultivated valley which is neither plowed nor sown. In the Talmud, the sage Mani asks about the killing of the animal: “When man has sinned, why has the animal sinned?” Once again, the hierarchical indication is implicit: the human community expiates the murder by killing an animal.

The fore-mentioned discussion between contemporary rabbis on the permissibility of animal experimentation also expands the hierarchical relationship between man and animals. Experimentation is permitted for human health purposes. Opinions only differ as to what purposes are meritorious and in which way animal experimentation should be carried out.

A further hierarchical insight on the man-animal relationship may be obtained from the Bible: “When you see the ass of your enemy lying under its burden and would refrain from raising it, you must nevertheless raise it with him.” Some may read this text to mean that the animal’s well-being takes priority over one’s enmity toward its owner. Other interpretations, however, suggest it mainly as a command to be charitable to one’s enemy. This follows from the previous verse, where one is told to return one’s enemy’s lost ox or ass to him.

e) Another example concerns hindrance legislation. A large number of hindrances have to be moved out of the city or away from neighbors’ facilities. However, neighbors cannot force a religious school out of their courtyard. In Jewish law, learning takes priority over preventing noise hindrance.

The rank accorded to learning in Jewish religious philosophy is well illustrated by an example from Mishnah Avot. R. Jakob says: “He who is walking by the way and rehearse what he has learnt, and breaks off from his rehearsing and says, How fine is that tree, how fine is that field, him the Scripture regards as if he were guilty against himself.” Reading this text from a hierarchical point of view it means: learning Torah is superior to admiring nature.

Also, existing nuisances often enjoy more legal protection than new ones not yet established. (Similarly, in contemporary general
legislation, the legislator is often more lenient with nuisance created by existing factories, for example, than with potential nuisance by new establishments that are yet to be built.)

Many more examples may be added to this list in the course of further research. The establishment of such an increasingly complex hierarchical map will be an important tool toward a more detailed definition of where Judaism stands with respect to environmental issues. 262

Conclusions

A number of conclusions can be drawn from the above.

1) A substantial corpus exists of 'environmental Halakha', based on rabbinic decisions issued over many centuries. Using today's definitions of environmental issues, one could compile what Halakha had to say on them until – say – the beginning of the 19th century. One would then find that Halakha held positions relevant to many of the major environmental issues in pre-industrial/mass consumption society. Some of these applied to Jews everywhere; others, only in the land of Israel.

2) It is reasonable to conclude from the Halakhot identified so far, that there is general Jewish concern for environmental matters as they are currently understood, even if the efforts to reach an integrated view of this have been limited. Hierarchical mapping is proposed as an important tool for clarifying the Jewish approach to environmental issues.

3) Many centuries ago already, Halakha limited the potential impact a Jew is allowed to make on various parts of the ecosystem and the environment. In some fields, modern environmentalism attempts to achieve results in line with what Judaism practiced. The practical attitude of Judaism does not make it a precursor of the ideological approach of modern environmentalism, as its mode of reasoning and its underlying values are very different.

4) A 'Jewish environmental codex' would refer inter alia to the explicit halakhic prohibitions against causing pain to animals. There is general rabbinical agreement that one is not permitted to wantonly destroy fruit trees or other elements of nature, or anything else useful to man, including oneself. There is some disagreement as to what extent useful natural resources may be destroyed for one's benefit and to what extent things may be destroyed which are not of benefit to man. Halakha is clearly in favor of moderation and opposed to conspicuous consumption. 263, 264 Its multiple rules also set behavioral limits to such an attitude. However, man is permitted to supersede almost all laws, including those regarding nature, to save his life.
Man is also told to protect his own health and that of others. In a broader sense, Halakha limits man’s power to act according to his inclinations. Shabbat limits man’s activities, as do the laws of kashrut. There are also laws with regard to some sexual matters that are of environmental relevance.

5) The small number of modern Jewish publications on environmental issues, and the apparent lack in many writers of a broad background in the environmental disciplines, suggest that only a part of the rabbinical discussions in the Talmud and later literature relating to environmental concerns have been listed, even in the bibliographies.

6) The relevance of responsa literature to environmental issues remains wide open as a field for additional scholarly research. As contemporary responsa cannot be accessed systematically, it is difficult to know to what extent modern rabbinical authorities have dealt with environmental issues.

7) Against the background of the existing halakhic infrastructure, I claim that Halakha could further be developed organically to deal with a series of other contemporary environmental issues. The simplest way to set this process in motion may be by environmentally-concerned Jews’ posing questions to halakhic authorities.

Notes for Chapter Three

1 There may be a second Jewish message to humanity with respect to a desirable attitude toward the environment. If they wish to, non-Jews can study halakhic rules and Jewish thoughts on environmental issues, and then evaluate what relevance these have for themselves or mankind in general. Although Judaism does not court converts, some Jewish thinkers claim that its spokesmen should take the initiative in conveying its ideas to the rest of the world. There is no consensus on this opinion. Those who hold this point of view would do well to present Jewish environmental attitudes from an overall perspective, rather than following the present fragmented trend. They could point to Judaism’s stands on issues such as limiting humanity’s freedom of action with regard to nature as well as other people.

2 Nature cannot be considered sacred but land can be, if God’s presence is there: “And He said, ‘Do not come closer. Remove your sandals from your feet, for the place on which you stand is holy ground.’ ” Exodus 3:5.

3 Throughout this thesis, unless explicitly stated, the word ‘Torah’ denotes the written law only.

4 Yosef Karo (1488–1575) was born in Toledo and died in Zefat.

5 Born in Krakow in 1510; died there in 1572.

6 "It is for this reason that after the tenth century we do not find any takkanot (enactments) that applied to Jews worldwide. Even the famous takkanot of Rabbenu Gershom, which included the prohibition against polygamy and the prohibition against opening a letter addressed to someone else, were not considered binding on significant segments of


9 Rabbi Salomo son of Isaac, the most popular Bible and Talmud commentator, who lived in France, 1040–1105.


12 No reference has been made in this study to the laws of cultural impurity, although certain aspects of these are concerned with health protection. These laws lend themselves to very diverse interpretations and should be analyzed as a specialized corpus. It should be noted, however, that most of the laws are no longer applicable.

13 Both idolatry and incest are mentioned among the “abhorrent things” done by the nations living in the land of Israel prior to the Israelites: they were “spewed out” by the land because of these activities. (See Leviticus Chapter 18.)


16 These are categories of Halakha which mainly refer to animals reared by man.

17 Particularly shillu’ah baken.

18 “No concept has been cited more often in the discussion of Jewish attitudes to nature than bal tashhit. It appears in virtually every article which attempts to articulate what constitutes the Jewish attitude to nature. Although it is based on a relatively small collection of sources, certainly in comparison to the Jewish attitude to animals, it has nonetheless been interpreted in different, and often contradictory ways.” Eilon Schwartz, Tzar Ba’alei Chaim and Bal Tashchit: Two Jewish Perspectives on Environmental Ethics. Masters Thesis, 1994, p. 66.


20 “Thus, in the war against Sennacherib, Hezekiah stopped all the fountains in Jerusalem. He was taken to task for it by the Talmudic sages: the Sifre considered this a violation of the Biblical commandment equal to chopping down a fruit tree, and in another incident, Elisha counseled such a scorched earth policy; Maimonides considered this a temporary suspension of the law for emergency purposes (hora’at sha’ab), a tactic permitted to a prophet, but an act which is not normative.” Norman Lamm, A Jewish View of the Environment and the Ecology. Lecture given at the Technion, Haifa, Israel, October 7, 1996.


22 Sifrei 203 (Finkelstein edition) on Deuteronomy 20: 19. “From where do we know that one may not divert the arm of a river (which supplies water to a city)? Because it is said ‘You shall not destroy (the city’s) trees in any way. It is said, ‘by swinging an axe against them.’ This would seem to prohibit only the use of iron tools. From where do we know then not to divert the flow of water? Since it is said ‘You shall not destroy its trees,’ this includes all modes of destruction.”

23 Bavli Shabbat 67b.


25 Ibid., 6:8.
David ben Samuel Halevi (1586–1667) lived in various places in Eastern Europe. Best known for his commentary Turey Zahav on Shulhan Arukh.


Personal communication.


Sefer balinnakh, commandment 529. This work was written by Rabbi Aaron Halevi from Barcelona around 1300. Jerusalem: Eshkol, 1946. Hebrew.

Ibid.

Bavli Shabbat 140b.


Bavli Berakhot 30b.

Bavli Berakhot 31a.


Abraham Ibn Ezra, a scholar in many fields, was born 1092 in Toledo, and died 1167 (perhaps in Rome). His best-known works are his Bible commentaries.

E. Schwartz, op. cit., p. 70.

Ayali’s approach in the field of bal tashhit can be extended to another extensive area of future research: how have environmental Halakhot, as expressed in the rabbinical literature, developed over the centuries?


Bavli Bava Kama 91b.

Rabbi Moses Sofer was born in Frankfurt am Main in 1762 and died in Bratislava in 1839.


Teshuvot Noda biYehuda, Yoreh De’ah, No. 10. Hebrew.


Rabbi Immanuel Jakobovits, op. cit., p. 89.

Dr. Shimshon Ettlinger of the Hebrew University. In: ibid., p. 91.

Ibid.

Jacob Ettlinger, born in 1798 in Karlsruhe, Germany. He died in 1871.

Ettlinger was asked about a patient with a rare disease of which another patient had already died. The doctors wondered whether a body can be operated upon in order to identify the cause of death and save a life. Ettlinger opposed the autopsy for a variety of reasons: the dead person has no obligation toward the living, while the living are obliged to respect the dead; and it is not certain whether the new patient’s life would
be saved by this action while it is certain that the dead body would be desecrated. Responsa Binyan Zion 170. Hebrew.

60 Mishnah Bava Batra 2:3. Hebrew.


62 According to Rashi, somebody who performs circumcisions.

63 According to Rashi, a bloodletter.

64 Bavli Bava Batra 21a.


66 For example, the case of the smell of medicinal incense mentioned in the Radbuz responsa below.

67 Ilani refers to the comment of Rabenu Tam - a 12th century French scholar - on Bavli Bava Batra 23a, where he says that even if somebody sold an asset to somebody else and it turned out that the buyer causes him nuisance, he can change his mind retroactively as this is an "erroneous transaction". The seller thought that he could stand the nuisance but now it turns out that he cannot, and thus he can annul the transaction. Ibid.

68 See the examples mentioned in the Mishnah Bava Kama 7:7, one of which is the prohibition against raising small cattle in the Land of Israel, but not in its deserts.

69 Ilani refers here to a responsa of Rabbi Hayim Faladji which deals with a case where somebody wants to sell his courtyard to a Christian and the neighbors oppose this out of fear that a missionary school will be established there. Faladji mentions that one should give the neighbors financial assistance to buy the courtyard. He also mentions that he once helped people to buy out the courtyard of a non-Jewish prostitute. Responsa Ruach Chayim 2: 155.7. Published in Izmir 1877.

Chapter 10.4, states that the East wind is hot and thus diminishes the nuisance of odors. Hebrew.

87 Mishnah Bava Batra 2.4. Hebrew.
88 Bavli Bava Batra 22b.
89 Rabbi Yom Tov ibn Ashvili was born in Spain circa 1260; died in Seville circa 1328.
91 Shulhan Arukh Hoshen Mishpat, section 155. Hebrew.
93 Ibid.
94 Ibid., p. 137.
95 Ibid., p. 138.
96 Ibid., p. 143.
97 Ibid., p. 144.
98 For an example see Bavli Bava Batra 22b/23a.
99 Rabbi Meir ben Baruch of Rothenburg was born about 1215 in Worms, and died in Anshelm prison in 1293.
101 Rashba, Respona 2:45. Hebrew.
102 Rabbenu Asher born around 1250 in Germany and died in 1327 in Spain.
105 Teshuvot Ritva, no. 124. Hebrew.
106 Its author, Rabbi Israel ben Petachyah Isserlein, was born in Regensburg 1390 and died in 1460 in Vienna-Neustadt, where he was chief rabbi.
108 Rabbi David ben Solomon ibn Avi Zimra was born in Spain in 1479 and died in Palestine in 1573. He left Spain in 1492 when the Jews were expelled from there, and lived intermittently in Cairo and Zefat.
110 Rabbi Isaac ben Sheshet Perfet was born in Barcelona in 1326 and died in Algiers in 1408. He served as a rabbi in important communities in Spain and after 1391 fled to Algiers, where he became Chief Rabbi.
111 Respona Rivash 196. Hebrew.
112 Rabbi Levi ben Chaviv, born in Zamora (Spain) around 1483, died in 1545 in Jerusalem.
113 Teshuvot Maharalbach Section 97. Hebrew.
114 Rabbi Shlomo Cohen, the Maharschach, lived in the Ottoman Empire, and died in 1602.
119 Exodus 23:10–11.
120 The ultra-Orthodox community and some of the modern Orthodox do not accept this transaction, and abstain from eating vegetables grown in the seventh year in Israel.
121 The issue also has political overtones. Israeli political scientist Shlomo Avneri argues that religion cannot be removed from the public sector, stating, “To believe that religion can be restricted to the individual, that it can be privatized, is to disregard the nature of religious faith as a sociological and anthropological phenomenon. Even in the most


123 Ibid., p. 126.

124 See also Talmudic Encyclopaedia, Vol. 22, columns 111–186.

125 "Jews were not to have a king before they acquired their land. Then they would know that from God they received it and not from a human majesty. Moreover, if after the coronation of a king the king might be inclined to forget this, he was to be annually reminded of his error, when all Jews would appear in the very city in which he held his court with their first fruits which they presented to the priests with a declaration of gratitude to God from Whom they received the gift of the land. And if feudalism might emerge later, as the king and others accumulated land unto themselves, the Law had its antidote in the form of a redistribution of the land every fifty years. Alienation of the land in perpetuity was well-nigh impossible." Emanuel Rackman, One Man’s Judaism. Tel Aviv: Greenfield, 1973, pp. 181–2.

126 Leviticus 25:23.

127 Gordis cites Psalm 24, which expresses the same principle: "The earth is of the Lord’s and the fullness thereof, the world and those who dwell therein." Gordis, op. cit., p. 11.

128 Ibid.

129 Ibid.


132 Ibid.

133 Gordis, op. cit., p. 11.


136 Deuteronomy 11:15.


138 Exodus 23:19.

139 Exodus 23:12.

140 Deuteronomy 5:13–14.

141 Hertz on Deuteronomy 5:14.

142 Eliezer Waldenberg allows a cow to be milked on Shabbat by a gentile because it is better to transgress one of the rabbinical rules with respect to Shabbat than the Biblical prohibition of causing animal suffering. *Ziz* Eliezer 2:3. Benzion Meier Uziel says that if no gentile is available, a Jew is also allowed to milk on Shabbat for the same reason. Responsa Piske Uziel *Besheelot Hazman* 20.


144 Deuteronomy 25:4.

145 Gordis, op. cit., p. 10.

146 Richard Schwartz, Judaism and Vegetarianism. Marblehead, MA: Micah, 1988, p. 10. He adds that this point is echoed by Rabbi Solomon Efraim Lunkitz, author of *Kli Yakar*: "What was the necessity for the entire procedure of ritual slaughter? For the sake of self-discipline. It is far more appropriate for man not to eat meat; only if he has a strong desire for meat does the torah permit it, and even this only alter the trouble and the inconvenience necessary to satisfy his desire." Ibid., p. 11. Quoted from The Commandments and Their Rationale. Jerusalem: Abraham Chill, 1974, p. 400.
The laws for sacrifices of the individual, the community and the priests are given in Leviticus Chapters 1-7, while Leviticus Chapters 8-10 describe the start of worship in the tabernacle.


Leviticus 20:15-16.


This refers to the argument as to whether the animal enjoys the sin, and thus should be killed. It is argued that even trees which are used for idolatry have to be destroyed, and they certainly do not enjoy the sin. Bavli Sanhedrin 55a.

The Talmud perceives here that communities often do not wish to be reminded of criminal acts committed in their midst. This universal motif is also shown implicitly in the way in which returning Jews were received in The Netherlands after the Second World War. See J. Presser, Ondergang. The Hague: Nijhoff, 1965, Part 2, p. 505ff. Dutch.

Such views can only be subjective. Yehudah Levi comments: “The explanation seems eminently reasonable.” Private communication.

Spero, op. cit., p. 156.


Hertz, op. cit., p. 310.

Leviticus 19:19.


Nachmanides gives the following reason for kilayim: God has created species which should not change for eternity as long as He wishes it so.

Bavli Sanhedrin 56b.

Ibid.

Solomon, op. cit., p. 44.

Numbers 35:2-5.

Rashi on Numbers 35:2.

Numbers 35:6-7.


Levinas points out that refuge towns could not be small because the avenger could easily penetrate them without encountering much resistance. Nor could they be too large, because the avenger could wander there unobserved. He also mentions that there should be sufficient inhabitants, so that a person attacked could call for help; if the number of inhabitants decreased, efforts should be made to find replacements. Many other precautions were made to increase the city's livability and safety of the refugees. Levinas underlines the 'humanitarian urbanism' of these cities. People had to live there in the fullest sense of the word: “Life signifies that which merits that name; life in the plain sense of the term: exile, yes, but not prison, not jail, not concentration camps. Life that is life.” There is even a baraita that when a student has to be exiled in a refuge city, his teacher must go with him, because the right to instruction is an elementary requirement of life. Levinas observes: “Can one live without culture? Can one really live without Torah? Here, the Torah is part of the refuge city. Torah, for cultural needs, maybe, and not in its ultimate essence.” Ibid.

The sage Rava states that the community of Israel says: “Lord of the world, do not judge me as one judges people from the big city, [explained by the medieval commentator Rashi as a big market town where there are merchants and peddlers] among whom
one finds robbery, adultery and perjury." (Bavli Eruvin 21b). The sage Rav says that it is preferable for people to move to relatively new towns where, because of their newness, sins are few (Bavli Shabbat 10b). Elsewhere he tells another Rabbi not to live in a town where no horse neighs and no dog barks (Bavli Pesahim 113a).

Daniel Elazar, A Biblical View of the City and the Walls Within It. Lecture given at the Department of Philosophy, University of Toronto and Holy Blossom Temple, 1995. Elazar adds: "It cannot be accidental that Cain, the first murderer, also founds the first city (Genesis 4:17). In some respects, this can be seen simply as the linkage between urbanization and violence upon which many have commented. But the Biblical story is more subtle than that. Cain murders out of passion, he is not a reasoned killer, not cold-blooded nor one who murders for the love of it. He simply cannot control his passions at a particular moment or in a particular situation. Significantly enough, cities are places where density and the pressures related to it lead people into uncontrollable acts of passion, acts which are often violent in character, far more so than rural areas. That is one dimension of the Biblical account. Another is that people who commit violence need to protect themselves against retribution." Ibid.


Ibid.


Ibid., p. 201.

Robert Gordis already saw this early on in the Jewish-environmental discourse: “The Hebrew dietary laws represent a complex of sources, practices and values which have as yet been incompletely explored.” Robert Gordis, A Basis For Morals: Ethics in a Technological Age. Judaism, Winter 1976, Vol. 25, No. 1, p. 36. This observation remains valid to the present day.

Ibid., on Yore Deah 3:35. Hebrew.
194 Slae, op. cit., p. 41.
196 Responsa Ase Lecha Raw Tome Six, Tel Aviv, 1985, 58. Hebrew.
197 Halevi states that there are two conflicting commandments with regard to this issue: on the one hand, one must honor his parents and on the other, it is prohibited to “put a hindrance before a blind man.” Ibid.
198 Ibid., Tome Two, 1979, 8.
200 Bleich, op. cit. The various rabbinical positions on this issue are described on pp. 231-232.
201 Responsa Mayim Chayim, Tome Two, Tel Aviv 1995, 50. Hebrew.
202 Ibid.
204 Ibid. Yosef states that zara’at ba’alei hayyim is a prohibition based on the Torah and therefore is more stringent than bal tashhit and rabbinical prohibitions concerning Shabbat.
205 Ibid. He also quotes the Talmud (Bavli Avodah Zarah 18b) where R. Simon ben Pazzi comments that the verse “happy is the man who has not... taken the path of the sinners” (Psalms 1:1) refers to those who do not go to contests between wild beasts or between wild beasts and man.
206 Ibid., pp. 237-250. Bleich makes the controversial claim that not only are Halakhot binding because their principles are Divinely revealed, but that the same goes for ethical principles. “Accordingly, even though Judaism certainly does not posit vegetarianism as a normative lifestyle, its value as a moral desideratum can be acknowledged only if support is found within the corpus of the Written or Oral Law.” (pp 237-238).
207 Ibid., p. 240.
209 I concur with this opinion from personal experience.
210 Bleich, op. cit., p. 246.
211 Ibid., p. 250.
212 R. Schwartz, op. cit., p. 4.
214 Rosen has not laid this down in a formal halakhic decision. (Personal communication.)
215 Lamm, Technion lecture, op. cit.
216 Genesis 1:29.
218 Ibid.
221 Ibid. Wolf is leader of the North American Jewish Vegetarian Society, an affiliate of the London-based organization.
223 Halevi quotes the Talmud, Bavli Taanit 20b. Every Friday, Rav Huna would send a messenger to the market to buy all the surplus vegetables remaining in the market. These would be thrown in the river. He did not give them to the poor, as they would
then count on it and this, in turn would affect market prices. He did not give them to the animals, because one should not give human food to animals. R. Huna's reason for doing this was that, if he did not, the market people left with their wares would no longer bring vegetables to the market. Ibid.

224 Ibid.


226 Ibid., 69.

227 Ibid.

228 Ibid., Tome 2, 65.

229 Ibid.


237 The medical field is one area where Halakha has developed in recent years, due to the problems Jewish hospitals, physicians and patients face when confronted with new techniques and technologies touching upon birth and death. Sickness is an obvious personal concern of those who address questions to halakhic authorities.

238 Solomon, op. cit., p. 41.

239 Bavli Shabbat 14b–15a.

240 Bavli Bava Kama 82a.

241 So, for example, it has been pointed out that U.S. cancer screening programs run at an estimated cost of about $10,000 per life saved. On the other hand, the cost of the Occupational Safety and Health Administration's benzene regulations per life saved reaches about $300 million. The cost of hydrogen recombiners in nuclear power plant design was estimated at about $3 billion per life saved. Aaron Wildavsky, Searching for Safety. New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 1988, p. 89.

242 Bavli Hullin 17a.

243 Ibid.

244 Diamond, op. cit., p. 18.


246 There are other examples of prohibitions being temporarily abandoned in special situations. For example, the Talmud mentions that the eating of pig meat was allowed during the seven years of Joshua's conquest of the Land of Israel. Bavli Ta'anit 11a.

247 Novak, Social Ethics, op. cit., p. 59. Novak discusses a hierarchy of symbols. He quotes the Talmudic principle that "the Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath" (Bavli Yoma 85b) to illustrate this.

248 Bavli Ta'anit 11a. Modern environmental reading might assume that this is in order not to bring children into the world, when the carrying capacity is low. Rashi read it differently saying that man should impose suffering upon himself in difficult times. Rashi on Bavli Ta'anit 11a.
Deuteronomy, 16:21. The Jewish Publication Society translation does not render the idea of planting a tree very well. Rashi points out, based on Sifrei, that it is forbidden to plant such a tree even if one has no intention of worshipping it.

Deuteronomy 12:2–3.

Responsa Yabia Omer Part 6, section 32. Hebrew.


Hertz points out the ‘great negative message’ of the story, saying: “In that age, it was astounding that Abraham’s God should have interposed to prevent the sacrifice, not that He should have asked for it. A primary purpose of this command, therefore, was to demonstrate to Abraham and his descendants after him that God abhorred human sacrifice with an infinite abhorrence.” J.H. Hertz, ed. The Pentateuch and Haftorahs, 2nd ed. London: Soncino, 1961, p. 201. Hertz also refers to Moses’ warning not to follow the habits of the surrounding people, as written: “You shall not act thus toward the Lord your God, for they perform for their gods every abhorrent act that the Lord detests.” Deuteronomy 12:31.

Genesis 4:4.

Genesis 8:20–21.


Bavli Yoma 22b.

Exodus 23:5.


As Norman Lamm puts it: “This is not by any means an anti-aesthetic statement. It is a ruling on the relative merits of seeking the Creator through His handiwork (nature) and through His revelation (Torah).” Torah uMadda: The Encounter of Religious Learning and Worldly Knowledge in the Jewish Tradition. Northvale, New Jersey: Jason Aaronson, 1994, p. 147.

Some attention should also be given to what is not said. According to Jewish tradition, all commandments must be respected. Nonetheless, it is considered that the ten commandments express the essential teachings of Judaism. The Decalogue deals with the Jew’s relationship to God, his family, fellow man, Shabbat and even animals. It does not contain a specific commandment not to pollute, to abstain from wanton destruction or to deal respectfully with nature.

Opposition to conspicuous consumption also overlaps with opposition to the accumulation of power. This is clearly stated in case the Israelites want to appoint a king: ‘Moreover he shall not keep many horses or send people back to Egypt to add to his horses, since the Lord has warned you, “You must not go back that way again.” ’ Deuteronomy 17:16. For Biblical attitudes toward power, see Moshe Greenberg, Biblical Attitudes toward Power: Ideal and Reality in Law and Prophets. In: Edwin B. Firmage, et al., eds., Religion and Law: Biblical-Judaic and Islamic Perspectives. Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1990, pp. 101–112.


The responsa of only a few of the leading contemporary halakhic authorities are available on the Bar Ilan University’s Judaic Library CD-Rom. Halevi for instance, is one of those who is not.
Chapter Four

Jewish Attitudes to the Environment in the Bible’s Narrative

Beside the halakhic Torah texts referred to in the previous chapter, additional insights into Jewish attitudes to the environment can be gleaned from the Bible’s other writings. Many references to the present subject are contained in its narrative, prophetic and wisdom texts, and may be found by reading these from the viewpoint of the environmental discipline.

Because Halakha defines the normative behavior of observant Jews, the Torah’s halakhic rules and their development over the centuries lend themselves better than other Bible texts to analysis of Jewish attitudes to the environment. As a result, little attention has been given in modern Jewish publications to the non-halakhic texts.

As the non-legal parts of the Bible permit more, and wider, interpretations than the legal sections, greater familiarity with environmental thinking and motifs is required for analyzing attitudes toward the environment. This may explain why contemporary Jewish writers have displayed faint interest in tackling these texts.

Emphasis on approaches and tools

A systematic review of the entire Bible – and, of necessity, its main Jewish commentators also – with regard to its relevance to the field of environment would require the effort of several scholars over many years. A main concern of this chapter, therefore, is to demonstrate by means of examples the approaches and tools by which such an effort can be undertaken.

In this chapter, I have separated the analysis of Bible texts from that of commentators. This will lead to some repetition; for instance, discussion on the Flood and the Ten Plagues will be found in both sections.

In the process, a more complete and detailed picture of Jewish attitudes toward the environment, as we currently understand it, will emerge than can be obtained from Halakha alone. From the strategist’s vantage point the various types of classical Jewish texts reflect similar and/or complementary values, even if their modes of
expression differ. Jewish observance and thought combined offer a broad perspective on the present subject.

**Different approaches**

In this chapter, a number of methods are indicated which facilitate a more informed perspective on Jewish attitudes toward the environment in the Bible. It may be presumed that most of the Torah's Halakhot with evident environmental aspects have been identified by now. However, this is not necessarily the case either with other Bible texts or, more particularly, with those of Bible commentators in both the *Midrash* and later literature.

The focus in this chapter is mainly on some of the Bible's narratives, as they contribute the most to our subject. However, some reference will also be made to other texts. Four different approaches are suggested below which, when combined, demonstrate the variety of views of environmental relevance expressed in the Bible.

1) One can review those stories in the Bible with obvious environmental aspects, and analyze them from a modern environmental viewpoint—occasionally even with the methods, tools and categorization of modern environmentalism. Such an approach helps in some cases to identify where religious and environmental aspects overlap and diverge. My analysis will compare environmental and religious thinking in some specific cases, in an attempt to clarify the way in which these two very different worlds approach the subject.

This, in turn, provides additional perspective on interpreting Jewish attitudes to environmental issues. In commenting on the non-legal sections of the Bible, I attempt to stay close to the 'plain meaning' of the written text (*peshat*). This approach has a long tradition, and was used systematically by Rashi, the most important classical Bible commentator. *Peshat* means different things at different times. The present generation often conceptualizes the literal meaning of the texts differently from the way previous generations have done, sometimes using tools from disciplines which were not yet established as such in earlier times.

In the Bible one finds perceptions relevant to many disciplines, including law, history, education, botany, geography, literature, psychology, architecture, art, medicine, epidemiology, warfare, social policies, economics and marketing. Similarly, in addition to the halakhic issues already referred to in the previous chapter, concerns which nowadays have been grouped within the new sphere of environmentalism are also touched upon in a number of places.

Looking at the Bible's narrative from a modern environmental viewpoint is not a classical method of interpretation. However, it
does fit a long tradition of ever-widening interpretation of these texts. As new disciplines have emerged (e.g. psychology), their methods of analysis have been applied to Bible texts and have found broad acceptance. Similarly, the environmental discipline also enables us to obtain more insights into an ancient text which lends itself to multiple interpretations.

2) A further indication of classical Judaism’s views on the environment can be gained by reviewing the Bible texts included in the Orthodox prayer book. The prayers of environmental relevance usually refer to nature and, to a lesser extent, to sacrifices. The rabbis who composed the prayers in post-Biblical times selected for the task those Biblical concepts which they wished most to emphasize.

3) Another approach is reviewing modern Jewish publications, to see how they interpret various non-halakhic passages in the Bible. This was my principal method when discussing environmental aspects of Halakha. Its contribution is limited, however, for the Biblical narrative.

4) Further insights can be obtained from the way in which different Jewish commentators have interpreted Bible texts with environmental relevance. Here, I limit myself to a few examples from some of the major commentators on such cases as the Creation, the Flood and the Ten Plagues. A systematic review of the Bible commentators can yield not only numerous insights; it may also permit a comparison of attitudes toward environmental matters between commentators, as well as mapping the development of attitudes over time.

The narrative and environmental elements

Several Bible stories can be related to specific environmental elements.

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Environmental element</th>
<th>Bible Story</th>
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<td>The Plagues of Egypt</td>
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<td>Idolatry of nature</td>
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Relation with animals: Eliezer’s choice of Rebecca
Isaac’s sacrifice
Balaam’s ass
Elijah and the raven

Preservation of natural resources: Abraham and Lot separate
Joseph’s grain-hoarding
The Temple’s recycled gold
Wars and ‘scorched earth’

Nuisance/pollution: The Plagues of Egypt
The fall of Jericho
Elisha has to cure the water
Ezekiel’s vision of water

I. The Narrative

The Biblical attitude toward the environment will be reviewed through the analysis of a number of subjects in the narrative:

a) The Paradise story
b) Nature
c) Natural resources
d) The position of animals
e) Pollution

a) The Paradise story

Here I shall apply the methodology of the modern environmental discipline to some Biblical narratives. Like any reality, Paradise and life in it can be analyzed speculatively with the tools of the environmental audit and environmental impact assessment, filling the gaps in the story with conjecture based on analogies from what we know about primitive society. When we ask what pollution man and animals created in the Garden of Eden, what risks to the ecosystem they represented, the answer seems to be: almost none.

Basic human needs like housing, transport and safety, as later became evident in early societies, did not yet exist in Paradise. Not even clothing was required. Humanity used neither textiles nor other materials. There was no potential scarcity of resources. Man needed neither products nor tools, so there were no production residues.

No artificial fertilizers or pesticides were required for plants to grow. Man and animals ate only vegetables. All that humanity used, which seems exclusively to have been food, was biodegradable and
probably metabolized into plants. There were no landfills. Animals did not require special protective measures, as they were not attacked by any other creatures. Biodiversity was thus maintained.

Most probably vegetarian, not-yet-violent man did not harm nature in any way or have any other impact on the ecosystem. Application of environmental analytical tools reveals a situation of perfect sustainability.

A similar situation is forecast at the end of days, as described in the prophecies of Isaiah: “The wolf shall dwell with the lamb, the leopard lie down with the kid; the calf, the beast of prey, and the fatling together, with a little boy to herd them.” 3 and “The wolf and the lamb shall graze together, the lion shall eat straw like the ox, and the serpent’s food shall be earth. 4 In all My sacred mount nothing evil or vile shall be done.” 5 There is also a prophecy that there will no longer be conflicts between man and animal. 6

Obviously, from the modern environmentalist’s viewpoint, this story has an allegorical character. He is not aiming for a world in which the wolf will not eat the lamb and the lion will abstain from consuming the ox. Nonetheless, his professional tools permit analysis of this story – with one exception: the one element in the Paradise story which cannot be explained by environmental analysis is why this equilibrium is perturbed. Why would the eating of a fruit from a specific tree lead to expulsion from one’s original environment? One has to make suppositions here which have no basis in the text.

At this point, the religious viewpoint diverges from the environmental one. Humanity has not respected one of the very few Divine rules given to it; it has been tempted by an animal, and is consequently chased out of Paradise. This prohibition even has an environmental undertone: not all that one sees and desires should be consumed. However, this was not what the Divine message states explicitly: “And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, ‘Of every tree of the garden you are free to eat; but as for the tree of knowledge of good and bad, you must not eat of it; for as soon as you eat of it, you shall die.’ ” 7

In the Jewish vision, Creation is perfect. God explicitly says so a number of times: “And God saw all that He had made, and found it very good.” 8 In his original environment, the Garden of Eden, man is obedient to God. He can live in harmony with God as he has not yet sinned. His transgression of a Divine commandment disrupts the world’s initial equilibrium.

For all the radical differences between modern environmentalism and Judaism, Paradise represents a common utopian ideal. In its
messianic thought, Judaism strives for a similar situation at the end of days. Environmentalism aims for full sustainability.

The values and motives of these two worlds of thought, however, are entirely different. Few Biblical stories illustrate these differences so well as that of Paradise. If we stay as close as possible to the written text and analyze the references to God, man and animal, the story can be summarized by saying that God made the world perfect. An animal persuaded man to take initiative to bring it out of equilibrium. Man could not even adhere to the few rules God had asked him to obey. Here the basic understanding of environmentalism and Judaism overlaps; but their interpretation of the story’s underlying values diverges significantly.

b) Nature

No word for ‘nature’ exists in the Bible. In line with current practice, I consider the inanimate which is not man-made, wild plants and animals as belonging to nature. The Bible holds a very specific position toward the undomesticated state of the living and the inanimate. It conveys two important messages as a result of nature’s being a creation of God’s: firstly, it is a manifestation of God’s majesty and should be recognized as such by man; secondly, in view of the above, God may use creation as He sees fit, and may change it at will. The latter means, for example, that He can transform non-living in living nature or destroy living nature at will.

Yehuda Feliks states that the large number of descriptions of nature in the Bible is only one of its remarkable aspects. He claims that “its ‘strength of expression’ regarding nature is unparalleled in any other contemporary literature, including that of Ancient Greece and the Ancient East.”

Not only is nature and its behavior controlled by God; so is all that happens, according to one of the Bible’s wisdom texts: “Just as you do not know how the lifebreath passes into the limbs within the womb of the pregnant woman, so you cannot foresee the actions of God, who causes all things to happen.”

Nature as a manifestation of God’s majesty

The rabbinical authorities who composed the prayers included in them a number of Bible texts of environmental relevance by current standards. Many of these express the concept that God has created the world and it should be a testimony to His majesty. Man should thank God who provides for him through nature. Many of these texts are from the Psalms.

In the daily morning prayer, it says: “all the gods of the peoples are things of nought, but the Lord made the heavens”, as well as
"Let the heavens rejoice and let the earth be glad; and let them say among the nations, the Lord reigns." 13 The latter verse is repeated in another prayer shortly thereafter.

One Psalm verse quoted in prayers says: "Sing to the Lord a song of praise, chant a hymn with a lyre to our God, who covers the heavens with clouds, provides rain for the earth, makes mountains put forth grass; who gives the beasts their food, to the raven's brood what they cry for." 14

Later in the same psalm, it says: "He lays down snow like fleece, scatters frost like ashes. He tosses down hail like crumbs – who can endure His icy cold? He issues a command – it melts them; He breathes – the waters flow." 15

The next psalm states: "Praise Him, highest heavens, and you waters that are above the heavens. Let them praise the name of the Lord, for it was He who commanded that they be created." 16

This is soon followed by a text from Nehemiah: "You alone are the Lord. You made the heavens, the highest heavens, and all their host, the earth and everything upon it, the seas and everything in them. You keep them all alive, and the host of heaven prostrate themselves before you." 17

Each day, a different psalm is read at the end of the morning service. Psalm 24, read on Sunday mornings, begins: "The earth is the Lord's and all that it holds, the world, and its inhabitants. For He founded it upon the ocean and set it on the nether-streams." 18

Shabbat prayers

The daily psalm read on Friday mornings and also included in the Friday night Shabbat inauguration service, contains a clear reference to nature as a Divine witness: "The ocean sounds, O Lord, the ocean sounds its thunder, the ocean sounds its pounding. Above the thunder of the mighty waters, more majestic than the breakers of the sea is the Lord, majestic on high." 19

In the Friday night prayer welcoming Shabbat, a psalm is said in which the Divine impact on nature is variously described: "The voice of the Lord breaks cedars; the Lord shatters the cedars of Lebanon. He makes Lebanon skip like a calf, Sirion, like a young wild ox. The voice of the Lord kindles flames of fire; the voice of the Lord convulses the wilderness; the Lord convulses the wilderness of Kadesh; the voice of the Lord causes hinds to calve, and strips forests bare." 20
This is a reflection both of God's majesty and of how He may use nature as He sees fit.

In the Shabbat morning prayer, a psalm verse says: "The heavens declare the glory of God, the sky proclaims His handiwork." 21 An-
other psalm verse in the same service says: “Praise the Lord of Lords... who made the heavens with wisdom, His steadfast love is eternal; who spread the earth over the water... who made the great lights... the sun to dominate the day... the moon and stars to dominate the night...”

The psalm read on the morning of the New Moon is almost entirely devoted to the same subject. As it is long, only a few verses are quoted here: “He made the moon to mark the seasons; the sun knows when to set. You bring on darkness and it is night, when all the beasts of the forests stir. He looks at the earth and it trembles; He touches the mountains and they smoke.”

*Nature’s modification reflects majesty*

In the narrative several modifications of nature – more commonly called miracles – also illustrate God’s majesty. These are considered both the proof and the result of God’s omnipotence. As an example, we might consider the institution of the rainbow, a sign of the covenant with humanity in the time of Noah. This is an element of nature which carries a permanent guarantee to mankind.

Another example of God’s majesty in the modification of nature is when Moses is given his mission to free the Israelites from Egypt: “An angel of the Lord appeared to him in a blazing fire out of a bush. He gazed, and there was a bush all aflame, yet the bush was not consumed. Moses said, ‘I must turn aside to look at this marvelous sight; why doesn’t the bush burn up?’”

In order to make it clear to the Israelites which men God has chosen as their leaders, God orders the chieftains of each tribe to bring their staffs and deposit them in the meeting tent: “The staff of the man whom I choose shall sprout, and I will rid Myself of the incessant mutterings of the Israelites against you.” By thus modifying inanimate nature, God wishes to teach a lesson to those who have rebelled against the authority of Moses and Aaron.

“The next day Moses entered the Tent of the Pact, and there the staff of Aaron of the house of Levi had sprouted: it had brought forth sprouts, produced blossoms, and borne almonds. Moses then brought out all the staffs from before the Lord to all the Israelites; each identified and recovered his staff.”

In order to instruct the heathen prophet, Balaam, not to curse the Israelites, an angel blocks his donkey’s way. Balaam hits the donkey three times, upon which “The Lord opened the ass’s mouth, and she said to Balaam, “What have I done to you that you have beaten me these three times?” Balaam said to the ass, ‘You have made a mockery of me! If I had a sword with me, I’d kill you.’ The ass said to Balaam,
'Look, I am the ass that you have been riding all along until this day! Have I been in the habit of doing thus to you?' And he answered, 'No.' Then the Lord uncovered Balaam’s eyes, and he saw the angel of the Lord standing in the way, his drawn sword in his hand; thereupon he bowed right down to the ground.”  

As in the case of Moses, nature is modified here to teach an individual a lesson.

Later in the Bible, a variant of this motif occurs again when nature temporarily acquires extraordinary properties. Naaman, commander of the army of the King of Aram, is told by the prophet Elisha to bathe seven times in the Jordan in order to be cured of his leprosy: “So he went down and immersed himself in the Jordan seven times, as the man of God had bidden; and his flesh became like a little boy’s, and he was clean.”

Normality depends on obedience

In the Bible, nature’s normal functioning is explicitly made subject to the Israelites’ obeying Divine commandments. If they do so, God will “grant the rain for your land in season, the early rain and the late. You shall gather in your new grain and wine and oil – I will also provide grass in the fields for your cattle – and thus you shall eat your fill.”

Conversely, idolatry will lead to starvation: “Take care not to be lured away to serve other gods and bow to them. For the Lord’s anger will flare up against you, and He will shut up the skies so that there will be no rain and the ground will not yield its produce; and you will soon perish from the good land that the Lord is assigning to you.”

This message is so central to Jewish thought that these verses are included twice in the daily prayers in the Shema.

Nehama Leibowitz summarizes, in what she calls “A biblical lesson in ecology”, various aspects of the same motif by stating that the land is ruined by immorality and incest while bloodshed pollutes the land. Even beyond that, “The soil, the ecology is put out of joint by any kind of human misconduct.”

In the books of the prophets, the motif of God’s using nature as a punishment for idolatry is extensively described in Joel. When the Jews turn back to God and repent, it is prophesied, the pastures in the wilderness will again give grass and the trees bear fruit. Rain will fall as before the punishment, part of which consisted of an invasion of locusts, and the Israelites will even be compensated for the lost harvests: “And threshing floors shall be piled with grain, and vats shall overflow with new wine and oil. I will repay you for the years
consumed by swarms and hoppers, by grubs and locusts, the great army I let loose against you. And you shall eat your fill and praise the name of the Lord your God who dealt so wondrously with you – my people shall be shamed no more."  

Hosea prophesies that even the relationship between man and animal will change when the Israelites abandon idolatry: “In that day, I will make a covenant for them with the beasts of the field, the birds of the air, and the creeping things of the ground; I will also banish bow, sword, and war from the land. Thus I will let them lie down in safety.”  

**Nature’s modification as punishment**

The Bible contains many examples of nature’s modification as a tool of punishment. As Divine retribution for the behavior of its citizens, catastrophe befalls Sodom in Abraham’s time. The city is destroyed through a rain of sulphur and fire, because there are not ten righteous men in the city. Lot’s wife is turned into a pillar of salt, because – while being saved from the disaster – she does not obey the one Divine instruction specific to this occasion: not to look back.  

The prophet Isaiah foretells that what happened to Sodom will happen again elsewhere: “And Babylon, glory of kingdoms, proud splendor of the Chaldeans, shall become like Sodom and Gomorrah overturned by God. Nevermore shall it be settled nor dwelt in through all the ages. No Arab shall pitch his tent there, no shepherds make flocks lie down there.”  

Jeremiah also foretells how God will use nature to punish the idolatrous Israelites: “And I will appoint over them four kinds [of punishment] – declares the Lord – the sword to slay, the dogs to drag, the birds of the sky, and the beasts of the earth to devour and destroy.”  

Nature’s ways can become a punishment in many forms. So Ahijah prophesies about King Jeroboam of Israel: “Anyone belonging to Jeroboam who dies in the town shall be devoured by dogs; and anyone who dies in the open country shall be eaten by the birds of the air, for the Lord has spoken.” A similar prophecy is made to King Baasha and to King Ahab.  

**The Ten Plagues**

The story of the Ten Plagues is the main example of a series of modifications of nature as a tool of punishment. A number of environmental disasters kill part of the Egyptian population, their slaves, animals and crops. These plagues do not affect the Israelites
living in the neighboring land of Goshen. The plagues end when the Egyptian ruler permits the Israelites to leave.

The bad effects of water and air pollution appear in several guises. When the river's water turns into blood, there is so much pollution that all "the fish in the Nile died. The Nile stank so that Egyptians could not drink water from the Nile; and there was blood throughout the land of Egypt." 44

While one of environmental science's major problems today is proving that certain sicknesses are caused by pollution, the motif of pollution's epidemiological character is stated explicitly in this story. Moses and Aaron take some handfuls of furnace soot, which becomes fine dust "and it caused an inflammation breaking out in boils on man and beast. The magicians were unable to confront Moses because of the inflammation, for the inflammation afflicted the magicians as well as all the other Egyptians." 45 Analyzed from the viewpoint of modern environmentalism it seems that air pollution causes an epidemic.

This series of events gains another dimension within the religious context. The Ten Plagues are a paradigm of the relationship of God, man and nature. Few other Biblical stories present in such detail the position of these three elements in Judaism. Humanity must obey God; if it does not, nature can be used in extraordinary ways to punish it.

Using nature at will

God can use nature at He sees fit. In this story, nature has no constancy, no rights: it is a Divine instrument. The inanimate rod can be turned into an animal: "The Lord said to Moses and Aaron, "When Pharaoh speaks to you and says, "Produce your marvel", you shall say to Aaron, "take your rod and cast it down before Pharaoh." It shall turn into a serpent.' So Moses and Aaron came before Pharaoh and did just as the Lord commanded them: Aaron cast down his rod in the presence of Pharaoh and his courtiers, and it turned into a serpent." 46

Similarly, in the third plague the inanimate dust turns into lice: "And the Lord said to Moses, 'Say to Aaron: "Hold out your rod and strike the dust of the earth", and it shall turn to lice throughout the land of Egypt.' And they did so. Aaron held out his arm with the rod and struck the dust of the earth, and vermin came upon man and beast; all the dust of the earth turned to lice throughout the land of Egypt." 47

God can indeed do with nature and animals whatever He sees fit within His own schemes. The river can be made unlivable for fish, in order to punish man. For the same purpose, frogs can multiply,
and die in the houses, courtyards and fields after they have fulfilled their role: “The Nile shall swarm with frogs, and they shall come up and enter your palace, your bedchamber and your bed, the houses of your courtiers and your people, and your ovens and your kneading bowls.” They disappear at God’s will: “And the Lord did as Moses asked; the frogs died out in the houses, the courtyards, and the fields. And they piled them up in heaps, till the land stank.”

*Man and beast punished together*

Man and beast alike are punished during several of the plagues. Vermin affects both the Egyptians and their animals, as does inflammation by boils. Hail strikes both of them if they are out in the open. Animals die in order to punish man: “the hand of the Lord will strike your livestock in the fields – the horses, the asses, the camels, the cattle, and the sheep – with a very severe pestilence.”

The essence of the religious message is very clear and is repeated several times: God can punish disobedient man by using nature against him. He can do so in a variety of ways and, if He wishes, can change the rules of nature that He created. For example, darkness hits the Egyptians in one place but not in another: “Moses held out his arm toward the sky and thick darkness descended upon all the land of Egypt for three days. People could not see one another, and for three days no one could get up from where he was; but all the Israelites enjoyed light in their dwellings.”

Animals can multiply, be moved, or even be killed at God’s will. The animal world is pitched against man in a variety of ways. Frogs invade the house; vermin infest him, insects invade the palace and ruin the crops; locusts eat the grasses of the field: “so that nothing green was left, of tree or grass of the field, in all the land of Egypt.”

Large parts of the ecosystem are damaged. The river Nile’s water becomes unusable; all field grasses and the fruit of trees are destroyed. At the same time, in the adjacent land of Goshen where the Israelites live, these effects do not take place. With the exception of the sixth plague, which can be considered an environmental paradigm of the epidemiology of pollution, the plagues are difficult to explain in an environmental analysis.

From the viewpoints of both modern environmentalism and Judaism, it is clear that a major disaster has befallen the Egyptians, their animals and the inanimate world. From the religious point of view, the motives for this are clear.

There are other religious elements which can have no place in environmental analysis and policies. Prayer by the right people may
succeed in eliminating the plagues. The Pharaoh could have prevented these disasters had he let the Israelites go.

The parting of the Red Sea

There is another striking example of a modification miracle in nature, to help the Israelites and punish their enemies, in the parting of the Red Sea: “The Lord drove back the sea with a strong east wind all that night, and turned the sea into dry ground. The waters were split, and the Israelites went into the sea on dry ground, the waters forming a wall for them on their right and on their left.” 56

Thereafter nature returns to itself. This is disastrous for the pursuing Egyptians, who drown in what is now the sea again: “Moses held out his arm over the sea, and at daybreak the sea returned to its normal state, and the Egyptians fled at its approach. But the Lord hurled the Egyptians into the sea.” 57

Korach’s punishment

During the crossing of the desert, when Korach leads a mutiny against Moses, the latter warns: “But if the Lord brings about something unheard-of, so that the ground opens its mouth and swallows them up with all that belongs to them, and they go down alive into Sheol, you shall know that these men have spurned the Lord.” 58

And indeed, the Torah tells us, an unnatural event does happen: “Scarcely had he finished speaking all these words when the ground under them burst asunder, and the earth opened its mouth and swallowed them up with their households, all Korach’s people and all their possessions. They went down alive into Sheol, with all that belonged to them; the earth closed over them and they vanished from the midst of the congregation.” 59

In the Biblical texts included in the prayers, we are also shown God’s ability to modify nature and use it as an instrument. As an example of the latter in Psalm 48, included in prayers on Mondays, we read: “With the east wind thou breakest the ships of Tarshish”. 60

The Flood

The Flood, the greatest natural disaster mentioned in the Bible, also expresses God’s use of nature as an instrument of punishment. Large parts of the ecosystem are destroyed. With the exception of Noah’s family, the whole of humanity is wiped out. 61

Through Noah, however, continuity with original man is maintained. Protected in the ark seven pairs of certain types of animals also remain; of others, only one pair. Thus biodiversity is assured, despite the catastrophe. The story does not reflect a minimalist envir-
onmental list approach. Noah and his wife are not necessary for protecting biodiversity. Their children are all born long before they enter the ark. There is also no evident environmental reason why one would take into the ark seven pairs of one species of birds rather than another.

The earth – including the highest mountain tops – is entirely covered with water through the lengthy rainfall. The trees apparently remain alive as, after the heavy rain has ceased, the dove brings back a plucked olive leaf. After the rain has stopped, man sacrifices some of the remaining animals, but does not choose from among those of whom only one pair was taken on board the ark.

From a modern environmental viewpoint, there is not much more that can be said about the text as it is written, other than that a huge natural disaster has taken place, the reasons for which can only be guessed. Some people and animals escape miraculously.

There is also no reason why such an environmental disaster should not recur; there are only religious motives for its non-occurrence. God promises that the earth will not be destroyed again because of man, and whatever modifications He may make in nature, there will be some constant elements: “The Lord said to Himself: ‘Never again will I doom the earth because of man, since the devisings of man’s mind are evil from his youth; nor will I ever again destroy every living being, as I have done. So long as the earth endures, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night shall not cease.’” 62, 63

The rainbow is the sign of this covenant with man: “I will remember My covenant between Me and you and every living creature among all flesh, so that the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh.” 64 Isaiah repeats this promise, stressing, however, that other major modifications of nature remain possible: “For this to Me is like the waters of Noah: As I swore that the waters of Noah nevermore would flood the earth, so I swear that I will not be angry with you or rebuke you. For the mountains may move and the hills be shaken, but my loyalty shall never move from you, nor My covenant of friendship be shaken.” 65

Religious interpretation

From the religious viewpoint, the Bible text gives a clear explanation for the catastrophe. Man has sinned against God: “The Lord saw how great was man’s wickedness on earth, and how every plan devised by his mind was nothing but evil all the time. And the Lord regretted that He had made man on earth, and His heart was saddened. The Lord said, ‘I will blot out from the earth the men
whom I created – men together with beasts, creeping things, and birds of the sky; for I regret that I made them’. But Noah found favor with the Lord.”

Nature is totally in God’s hands, and thus Noah is not needed to save the various species; but the story teaches humanity various lessons. One of these is that, while man and animal have sinned, a righteous man is chosen to play the key role in the survival of mankind and other species.

Through the destruction of both the human race and its property, God uses environmental disaster as a tool of punishment for the evil and violence that humanity has come to display. If this does not happen again in the future through a flood, it is not due to any act of man’s, but to God’s will. He says: “I will maintain My covenant with you: never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of a flood, and never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth.”

The main message which emerges is that, from the Biblical viewpoint, these environmentally-relevant aspects of the narrative do not stand alone: they need to be interpreted within the framework of religious values.

Some elements of this story seem to be repeating themselves in the modern pre-occupations of largely secularized Western society that global warming will lead to the melting of the polar ice caps and flooding of the low-lying parts of the world. While the similarity of the motif is obvious, the causes for this concern and the values revealed in discussions around the issue, are quite different. Analysis of this lies outside the scope of this study.

Beyond the Torah

God’s ad hoc modification of nature to punish and/or reward continues after Moses’ death, although not on such a large scale. When Joshua leads the Israelites into the Land of Canaan, he battles with the kings of the Amorites. “He [Joshua] said in the presence of the Israelites: ‘stand still, O sun, at Gibeon, O moon, in the Valley of Ayalon!’”

The next verses describe God’s influence on the events of the day: “And the sun stood still and the moon halted, while a nation wreaked judgment on its foes – as is written in the Book of Yashar. Thus the sun halted in midheaven and did not press on to set, for a whole day; for the Lord fought for Israel. Neither before nor since has there ever been such a day, when the Lord acted on words spoken by a man.”

When the Israelites under Joshua lay siege to the city of Jericho, the troops march around the city for six days, with the priests blowing
rams' horns and walking before the holy Ark. On the seventh day, they march around the city seven times; Joshua tells them to shout loudly upon his signal: "So the people shouted when the horns were sounded. When the people heard the sound of the horns, the people raised a mighty shout and the wall collapsed. The people rushed into the city, every man straight in front of him, and they captured the city."  

In modern environmental terms, a plain reading of the story can be given as 'excessive noise makes city wall collapse'. Its religious meaning, however, is totally different: if the Israelites obey the Lord, their enemies will be delivered into their hands.

In the time of the prophet Elijah, it is indicated that the rain is withheld because King Ahab and his predecessors have brought trouble on Israel "by forsaking the commandments of the Lord and going after the Baalim." At Elijah's request, Ahab organizes a demonstration on Mount Carmel where both the prophets of Baal and Elijah pray. The response from God to Elijah's prayer is a fire descending from the sky which consumes "the burnt offering, the wood, the stones, and the earth; and it licked up the water that was in the trench." The prophets of Baal are seized and slaughtered. Thereafter, "the sky grew black with clouds; there was wind, and a heavy downpour fell."

*Jonah's individual lessons*

So far we have largely seen how God uses the modification of nature to reward or punish man in smaller or larger groups. In the case of the prophet Jonah, a sequence of modifications of nature take place — rather than a single one, as was the case with Moses' burning bush and Balaam's speaking donkey — in order to teach an individual a lesson.

Jonah does not want to travel to Nineveh and tell its inhabitants that the city is going to be punished. He therefore flees on a ship going to Tarshish, but is taught a lesson through an event of nature: "But the Lord cast a mighty wind upon the sea, and such a great tempest came upon the sea that the ship was in danger of breaking up."

Jonah is thrown overboard by the sailors and "the Lord provided a huge fish to swallow Jonah." The prophet goes to Nineveh and speaks his prophecy; the people of Nineveh repent, which displeases him. To teach Jonah a further lesson, God interferes in nature once again: "The Lord God provided a ricinus plant, which grew up over Jonah, to provide shade for his head and save him from discomfort. Jonah was very happy about the plant. But the next day at dawn
God provided a worm, which attacked the plant so that it withered. And when the sun rose, God provided a sultry east wind; the sun beat down on Jonah's head, and he became faint."

All these references to modifications of nature can be summarized in the concept that as the creator of the world, God can do with it as He wishes. Nature can serve a multitude of purposes. Heaven and earth, moon and sun, must obey Him. Man and beast are fed by His will.

Perception of ecosystem components

The Bible contains many aspects of environmental relevance other than the modification of nature. One can analyze the references in it to the ecosystem or part of it, and thus obtain a view of how the desert, trees, animals, etc. are perceived in the classical Jewish world of thought.

Trees play a particularly important role, from the Tree of Knowledge in Paradise, through Abraham's oak to the story of Jonah. Often metaphorical use is made of them. In Ezekiel's visions, the righteous and the wicked are compared to trees: "Thus said the Lord God: I am going to kindle a fire in you, which shall devour every tree of yours, both green and withered."

A few sentences later, the explanation is given: "Say to the land of Israel: Thus said the Lord: '... I will wipe out from you both the righteous and the wicked. In order to wipe out from you both the righteous and the wicked, my sword shall assuredly be unsheathed.'"

In another vision, Assyria is compared by Ezekiel to "a cedar in Lebanon with beautiful branches and shady thickets, of lofty stature with its top among leafy trees."

The prophet expounds on the description of this huge tree for another six verses, before moving on to its destruction due to arrogance: "Strangers, the most ruthless of nations, cut it down and abandoned it; its branches fell on the mountains and in every valley; its boughs were splintered in every watercourse of the earth; and all the peoples of the earth departed from its shade and abandoned it."

In Jeremiah, the believer is compared to an evergreen tree: "Blessed is he who trusts in the Lord, whose trust is the Lord alone. He shall be like a tree planted by waters, sending forth its roots by a stream: it does not sense the coming of heat, its leaves are ever fresh; it has no care in a year of drought, it does not cease to yield fruit."

In the Psalms, a similar comparison is made for the righteous: "Happy is the man who has not followed the counsel of the wicked... He
is like a tree planted beside streams of water, which yields its fruit in season, whose foliage never fades, and whatever it produces thrives. Not so the wicked; rather, they are like the chaff that wind blows away.”

Similarly, one can analyze the perception of the desert associated with nomadic life. Several prophets, such as Jeremiah, Hosea, and Amos view certain aspects of nomadic life as ideal, speaking nostalgically about the Israelites’ past in the desert and their engagement with God. Amos condemns the luxury and easy aspects of city life. Hosea sees future salvation in a return to desert life.

One may ask several environmentally-relevant questions about the Israelites’ forty years in the desert. What was their impact on the wilderness? We have only a few indications in the narrative to analyze this. The story of the manna is one of these.

The desert may be looked at positively from a spiritual sense, but this still remains remote from the admiration of some modern environmentalists for the wilderness as an ecosystem. Fertile land which is not planted is viewed rather negatively in the Bible. Ezekiel states that God will see to it that the cities of the Land of Israel are rebuilt and the desolate wasteland tilled, not because the people merit it, but for God’s own sake.

The importance of a well-maintained ecosystem, in which the equilibrium between man and nature is viewed positively, is given a different perspective when God promises to drive out the inhabitants of Canaan: “I will not drive them out before you in a single year, lest the land become desolate and the wild beasts multiply to your hurt. I will drive them out before you little by little, until you have increased and possess the land.”

Israelite misinterpretation of nature

In practice, the Israelites often display an attitude toward nature which is proscribed by Halakha: it forbids the sanctification of nature or elements thereof. As pointed out in the previous chapter, they are warned explicitly against various types of idolatry. Places of pagan worship are often located at prominent natural features, which they then sanctify: “You must destroy all the sites at which the nations you are to dispossess worshipped their gods, whether on lofty mountains and on hills or under any luxuriant tree. Tear down their altars, smash their pillars, put their sacred posts to the fire, and cut down the images of their gods, obliterating their name from that site.”

They transgress regularly. Sun, moon and stars are other elements of nature frequently mentioned in the Bible as the object of the
Israelites’ idolatry. In the time of King Rehoboam, son of Solomon, the people of Judah commit sins: “They too built for themselves shrines, pillars, and sacred posts on every high hill and under every leafy tree; there were also male prostitutes in the land.” A later king of the same kingdom, Ahaz, follows suit: “He sacrificed and made offerings at the shrines, on the hills, and under every leafy tree.” His contemporary, Hosea, the last king of Israel, does the same. According to the Bible, these sins lead to the deportation of the country’s inhabitants to Assyria.

The same motif emerges in the writings of various prophets. For example, in Isaiah: “You are children of iniquity, offspring of treachery – you who inflame yourselves among the terebinths, under every verdant tree; who slaughter children in the wadis, among the clefts of the rocks.” Another prophet who takes up this motif is Ezekiel: “And you shall know that I am the Lord, when your slain lie among the fetishes round about their altars, on every high hill, on all the mountaintops, under every green tree, and under every leafy oak – wherever they presented pleasing odors to all their fetishes.”

**Natural resources**

The Bible tells us a number of basic things about natural resources:

- a) they are in God’s hand
- b) if people are dissatisfied with God-given natural resources, they may incur God’s wrath
- c) sometimes they are scarce and become a bone of contention
- d) they should be used wisely for economic purposes
- e) on a few occasions in times of war, there is a case for the destruction of natural resources which may serve the enemy.

Examples will be given of each of the above.

a) **Resources are in God’s hand**

If nature is in God’s hand, so are natural resources: God can supply or withhold them. One important, explicit example of this is the manna in the desert, which is supplied and disposed of in precise ways.

The manna is like bread which rains down from the sky: “When the fall of dew lifted, there, over the surface of the wilderness, lay a fine and flaky substance, as fine as frost on the ground.” The Israelites gather it every morning: “each as much as he needed to eat; for when the sun grew hot, it would melt.”
From a modern environmental viewpoint, a material melting in the sun may call up associations with such phenomena as photo-deterioration and photo-degradation.

An example of God's withholding natural resources as an expression of His wrath is found in Ezekiel: "And say to the people of the land: 'Thus said the Lord God concerning the inhabitants of Jerusalem in the land of Israel; They shall eat their bread in anxiety and drink their water in desolation, because their land will be desolate of its multitudes on account of the lawlessness of its inhabitants. The inhabited towns shall be laid waste and the land shall become a desolation; then you shall know that I am the Lord.' "

Water from the rock

Another example in the Torah's narrative of God's providing man with scarce natural resources relates to water, which He brings forth in several ways. “Then the Lord said to Moses, ‘Pass before the people; take with you some of the elders of Israel, and take along the rod with which you struck the Nile and set out. I will be standing there before you on the rock at Horeb. Strike the rock and water will issue from it, and the people will drink.’”

On another occasion, God tells Moses to speak to the rock: “Before their very eyes order the rock to yield its water. Thus you shall produce water for them from the rock and provide drink for the congregation and their beasts.” Moses does not obey the Divine order exactly: “And Moses raised his hand and struck the rock twice with his rod. Out came copious water, and the community and their beasts drank.”

Both stories have religious aspects other than what we may now call God's 'resources policy'. The first one tells us that the instrument for the punishment - in this instance, the rod - may occasionally be the same as that used for assistance, to indicate that it has no intrinsic value.

The second underlines the centrality of obedience to God. Because Moses does not follow God's instructions to the letter, he is punished: he is told that he will not lead the People of Israel into the Promised Land. One understands from the story that, while Moses' rod is not essential for the modification of nature, God's will is.

Isaiah tells us that in the future also, God will respond to the demand of the poor Israelites and make ample resources available where they usually are not: “I will open up streams on the bare hills and fountains amid the valleys; I will turn the desert into ponds, the arid land into springs of water.”
The motif returns a few chapters later: “The wild beasts shall honor Me, jackals and ostriches, for I provide water in the wilderness, rivers in the desert, to give drink to My chosen people.”  

b) Incurring God’s wrath

The Israelites’ perception that there are insufficient God-given resources in the desert raises God’s wrath: “The riffraff in their midst felt a glutinous craving; and then the Israelites wept and said, ‘If only we had meat to eat! We remember the fish that we used to eat free in Egypt, the cucumbers, the melons, the leeks, the onions, and the garlic. Now our gullets are shriveled. There is nothing at all! Nothing but this manna to look to!’ ” From a modern environmental point of view, this can be summarized as desire for conspicuous consumption (for foods from abroad.)

After these complaints, God provides the Israelites with quail from the sea: “The meat was still between their teeth, nor yet chewed, when the anger of the Lord blazed forth against the people and the Lord struck the people with a very severe plague. That place was named Kibroth-hataavah, because the people who had the craving were buried there.” The name of the location, Kibroth-hataavah, translates literally into ‘the graves of craving’.

We can also summarize the above by saying that, here, the Israelites are being taught that the environment is an integral part of the all-encompassing religious viewpoint. God provides humanity with its elementary needs. Man is not expected to consume conspicuously. God provides the manna in such a way that its residues do not pollute the soil. There is enough manna for everybody. However, it cannot be stored. Thus man remains dependent on God’s supply of new food each day.

c) The scarcity of resources

What we now would call policies and problems pertinent to natural resources are referred to a number of times. Water is a scarce resource and thus becomes a bone of contention: this happens more than once for both Abraham and Isaac. Abraham complains to Abimelech, king of Gerar: “Then Abraham reproached Abimelech for the well of water which the servants of Abimelech had seized. But Abimelech said, ‘I do not know who did this; you did not tell me, nor have I heard of it until today.’ ” Abraham then digs a new well; he gives seven ewes to the king and says: “You are to accept these seven ewes from me as proof that I dug this well.”

Earlier in Genesis, it is told that Abraham and Lot had so many flocks, herds and tents “that the land could not support them
staying together; for their possessions were so great that they could not remain together.”

Abraham then proposes that they should not compete for the resources and quarrel; rather they should go their separate ways, as apparently there are grazing resources available elsewhere. “Is not the whole land before you?” Let us separate: if you go north, I will go south; and if you go south, I will go north.”

Lot then chooses a place which is attractive in both its natural environment and its resources: the well-watered plain of the Jordan. He pitches his tents there, near Sodom, a town whose inhabitants are wicked sinners. This environment will later prove calamitous.

Plain religious reading of this text indicates that it can be disastrous to focus solely on material interests without taking spiritual ones into account.

Scarcity of water also leads to problems in the days of Isaac: “But when Isaac’s servants, digging in the wadi, found there a well of spring water, the herders of Gerar quarreled with Isaac’s herders, saying, ‘The water is ours.’ He named that well Esek, because they contended with him. And when they dug another well, they disputed over that one also.”

d) Wise management of resources

The message that humanity should carefully manage its resources is implicit in the story of Joseph. He advises the Pharaoh to hoard the surplus grain produced in the seven good years, so that there will be sufficient food in the meager years.

This story has both economic and environmental aspects. Thanks to Divine inspiration, Joseph has understood the meaning of Pharaoh’s dream. Abundant resources will become scarce. Nature’s resources should not be wasted, but properly managed in order to keep people alive in periods of difficulty.

The seven fat-fleshed cows who are eaten by the seven lean-fleshed cows, and the seven thin ears who swallow the seven healthy ears, illustrate natural cycles. Egypt had a long tradition of rationing Nile water on which the country’s well-being depended. One can only speculate that Joseph used this as a model for his grain purchasing and hoarding policy.

There is no doubt, however, that man can use natural resources for his benefit. This can be seen from the Bible text which says that, when the Israelites come into their land, this is “a land whose rocks are iron and from whose hills you can mine copper.”

Trees can be cut down to serve economic purposes, which is not seen as wanton destruction. Joseph’s descendants complain to Joshua
that they have not been given enough land for their numbers. Joshua replies: “Go up to the forest country and clear an area for yourselves there, in the territory of the Perizzites and the Rephaim, seeing that you are cramped in the hill country of Ephraim”.117 Apparently, this uninhabited land is easy to conquer. The same motif returns shortly thereafter: “The hill country shall be yours as well; true, it is forest land, but you will clear it and possess it to its farthest limits.”118

Cycling

What we now would call biogeochemical cycling and recycling is another environmentally-related motif that may be found in the Bible. This is first mentioned when God tells Adam: “By the sweat of your brow shall you get bread to eat, until you return to the ground – for from it you were taken. For dust you are, and to dust you shall return.”119

In Ezekiel’s prophecy, an innovative form of recycling is announced, when God tells the prophet: “Prophesy over these bones and say to them: O dry bones, hear the word of the Lord! Thus said the Lord God to these bones: I will cause breath to enter you and you shall live again. I will lay sinews upon you, and cover you with flesh, and form skin over you. And I will put breath into you, and you shall live again. And you shall know that I am the Lord!”120

When Moses fails to come down from Mount Sinai, the Israelites ask Aaron to make them a god. “Aaron said to them: ‘Take off the gold rings that are on the ears of your wives, your sons, and your daughters, and bring them to me.’ And all the people took off the gold rings that were in their ears and brought them to Aaron. This he took from them and cast in a mold, and made it into a golden calf.”121

Donations are made again on the occasion of the building of the Tabernacle: “Man and women, all whose hearts moved them, all who would make an elevation offering of gold to the Lord, came bringing brooches, earrings, rings, and pendants – gold objects of all kinds.”122 It is understood that jewelry and gold are recycled as they have no use as such in the Tabernacle, and we are told about the many ritual objects of gold which obviously must have been made from these.123

However, the Bible seems to indicate that, at certain times, not only recycling but also destruction is part of the normal course of things: “A season is set for everything, a time for every experience under heaven: a time for being born and a time for dying, a time for planting and a time for uprooting the planted.”124
In his assignment as a prophet Jeremiah is given four destructive tasks and two constructive ones: "See, I appoint you this day over nations and kingdoms: to uproot and pull down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant."  

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**d) War policies in Biblical times**

Destruction and pollution occur on several occasions, in connection with war. Several Israelite Biblical leaders, both the God-fearing and the wicked, carry out destructive policies. In one incident in the Bible, the kings of Israel, Judah and Edom apply a 'scorched earth' policy (including the felling of trees) in their war against the Moabites. The prophet Elisha orders the three kings: "You shall conquer every fortified town and every splendid city; you shall fell every good tree and stop up all wells of water; and every fertile field you shall ruin with stones." In line with classical Bible commentators, Feliks notes that this action referred to an enemy outside the land of Israel. This might explain the contradiction between the prophet's command and the commandment of *bal tashhit* as expressed in the Bible.

Another mode of causing environmental damage in Biblical wars would now be called intentional pollution. When the cruel Abimelech captures the town of Shechem, he not only razes it but sows it with salt. In another case of destruction of natural resources, when King Sennacherib of Assyria invades Judea and marches on Jerusalem, the religiously faithful King Hezekiah stops up all the springs outside the city in order to stop water supplies to the enemy.

**The position of animals**

The Bible provides many perspectives on animals and their position in society. The various motifs can be summarized as follows:

- **a)** Animal sacrifice as a substitute for human sacrifice
- **b)** Animals as a tool of Divine punishment
- **c)** Animals cannot wantonly be destroyed
- **d)** Animals should be treated well
- **e)** Animals are held responsible for their deeds
- **f)** Animals are also used in metaphors

**a) Isaac’s sacrifice**

Animal sacrifices appear early in the Torah as the private initiatives of both Abel and Noah. In Abraham’s time, man is given Divine instruction to offer sacrifices to God. Initially it seems that the commandment given to Abraham involves the sacrifice of a human being,
his own son; however, the story concludes with the sacrifice of an animal instead.\textsuperscript{131}

The facts in this story that are relevant to the man-animal relationship can be summarized very briefly. A man, Abraham, saddles his ass and takes his son, Isaac, two servants and some wood up to Mount Moria, in order to sacrifice the boy. The child is already tied up on top of the woodpile and Abraham is raising the knife for slaughter, when he sees a ram “caught in the thicket by its horns” and sacrifices that instead.

According to the Bible, Abraham is willing to sacrifice Isaac because God has told him to; afterwards, he sacrifices the ram instead of his son because this is what God’s angel instructs him to do. The message is theocentric: pious man must do whatever God commands him, even if it seems unreasonable from a human perspective.

Abraham is rewarded for his obedience to God by becoming the father of a nation, and is told that the rest of world will also benefit: “All the nations of the earth shall bless themselves by your descendants, because you have obeyed My command.”\textsuperscript{132}

This story, too, has aspects of environmental relevance within its framework of religious ideas. God tells humanity that humans should not be sacrificed, but animals can be. This seems to indicate a hierarchy within the ranks of Creation. (This is in line with the concepts discussed in Chapter Three.)

From a different angle, looking at their respective distance from God, the difference between man and animal seems negligible. This is succinctly expressed in Ecclesiastes: “For in respect of the fate of man and the fate of beast, they have one and the same fate: as the one dies so dies the other, and both have the same lifebreath; man has no superiority over beast, since both amount to nothing. Both go to the same place; both came from dust and both return to dust. Who knows if a man’s lifebreath does rise upward and if a beast’s breath does sink down into the earth?”\textsuperscript{135}

Abraham’s words reflect a similar idea with regard to man and the inanimate, when he attempts to reduce the number of righteous people needed to save Sodom. He addresses God, saying: “Here I venture to speak to my Lord, I who am but dust and ashes.”\textsuperscript{134} Job comes to a similar conclusion after his sufferings: “He regarded me as clay, I have become like dust and ashes.”\textsuperscript{135} and “Therefore, I recant and relent, being but dust and ashes.”\textsuperscript{136}

**Sacrifices substituted by prayers**

Biblical (and Mishnaic) texts referring to sacrifices have been given a substantial place in Jewish prayer. The story of Abraham’s sacrifice of Isaac is included in the morning prayer.
Biblical texts at the beginning of the morning prayer deal with the daily sacrifices which were offered while the Temple stood. After the destruction of the Temple, prayers took the place of these sacrifices. The concept behind this is found in the prophets: “Take words with you and return to the Lord. Say to Him: ‘Forgive all guilt and accept what is good; instead of bulls we will pay [the offering of] our lips.’”

b) Animals as a tool of Divine punishment or salvation

Animals are frequently used as a tool of Divine punishment or salvation of men. The first is seen multi-fold in the story of the Ten Plagues. There is also a Biblical prophecy which predicts that an insect will be useful in the conquest of the Land of Israel: “I will send hornets ahead of you, and it shall drive out before you the Hivites, the Canaanites, and the Hittites.”

The prophet Elijah conveys to King Ahab God’s message that nature will punish him and his people, and then flees for his life to the other side of the Jordan: “As the Lord lives, the God of Israel whom I serve, there will be no dew or rain except at my bidding.” God tells the prophet: “You will drink from the wadi, and I have commanded the ravens to feed you there.” Elijah does as he is told, and “the ravens brought him bread and meat every morning and every evening, and he drank from the wadi.”

But animals may also have an informative role, telling man about God. Job expresses this in a metaphor: “But ask the beasts, and they will teach you; the birds of the sky, they will tell you, or speak to the earth, it will teach you; the fish of the sea, they will inform you.”

c) No wanton destruction of animals

The Torah opposes wanton destruction of animals. In Jacob’s testament he speaks negatively about Simeon and Levi, who do not obey the law - most probably referring to their action against the inhabitants of Shechem, who had defiled their sister, Dinah. The patriarch mentions murder and the killing of animals in one breath: “For when angry they slay men, and when pleased they maim oxen. Cursed be their anger so fierce, and their wrath so relentless.”

d) Proper treatment of animals

In the previous chapter we have already mentioned how several Halakhot assure the proper treatment of animals. Several Bible stories stress the relevance of this to human society. From the ass’s speech to Balaam we understand that the considerate treatment of an animal serving its master is right according to the Torah: “The angel of the
Lord said to him, 'Why have you beaten your ass these three times? It is I who came out as an adversary, for the errand is obnoxious to me. And when the ass saw me, she shied away because of me those three times. If she had not shied away from me, you are the one I should have killed, while sparing her.' \(^{146}\)

The manner in which animals are treated is also considered a reflection of personality. This is illustrated in the story of Eliezer, Abraham’s senior servant, and his choice of Rebecca for Isaac’s wife. He arrives in the city of Aram-naharaim, and asks God for a sign that he is making the right decision: “Let the maiden to whom I say, ‘Please, lower your jar that I may drink’, and who replies, ‘Drink, and I will also water your camels’ – let her be the one whom You have decreed for Your servant Isaac.” Apparently, only a woman who treats animals well is worthy of the son of his master Abraham.\(^{147}\)

e) Animals are responsible for their deeds

Animals can sin and be held responsible for their deeds. This is true both for the snake in the Paradise story and the animals destroyed in the Flood. In the first story, the snake has tempted the woman to eat the forbidden fruit: “Then the Lord God said to the serpent, ‘Because you did this, more cursed shall you be than all cattle and all the wild beasts: on your belly shall you crawl and dirt shall you eat all the days of your life. I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; they shall strike at your head, and you shall strike at their heel.’ ” \(^{148}\)

Similarly, in the story of the Flood: “The Lord said, ‘I will blot out from the earth the men whom I created – men together with beasts, creeping things, and birds of the sky; for I regret that I made them.’ ” \(^{149}\) The reason for this is given a few verses later: “When God saw how corrupt the earth was, for all flesh had corrupted its ways on earth, God said to Noah, ‘I have decided to put an end to all flesh, for the earth is filled with lawlessness because of them: I am about to destroy them with the earth.’ ” \(^{150}\) Thus the phrase ‘all flesh’ appears to include animals, who were also corrupt. (For other exegeses, see later in this chapter.)

In what is probably a metaphor, Ezekiel reproaches animals that they behave badly: “Is it not enough for you to graze on choice grazing ground, but you must also trample with your feet what is left from your grazing? And is it not enough for you to drink clear water, but you must also muddy with your feet what is left? And must My flock graze on what your feet have trampled and drink what your feet have muddied?” \(^{151}\)
The story of Jonah also seems to indicate that animal responsibility does exist: "And he had the word cried through Nineveh: 'By decree of the king and his nobles: No man or beast – of flock or herd – shall taste anything! They shall not graze, and they shall not drink water! They shall be covered with sackcloth – man and beast – and shall cry mightily to God. Let everyone turn back from his evil ways and from the injustice of which he is guilty.'" 152

Later in the story, after the story of the ricinus plant, it is indicated that Divine mercy extends to animals "Then the Lord said: 'You cared about the plant, which you did not work for and which you did not grow, which appeared overnight and perished overnight. And should not I care about Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand persons who do not yet know their right hand from their left, and many beasts as well!'" 153

f) Animals in metaphors

Animals are sometimes used in metaphors; their most essential characteristics are often described in terms of human personality.

A series of – partly obscure – references to animals is given in Jacob's deathbed forecast of what will befall his sons in the future.154 Judah is compared favorably to the lion, the king of beasts; but then reference is also made to an ass.155 Issachar is rather scathingly compared to a "strong-boned ass, crouching among the sheepfolds. When he saw how good was security, and how pleasant was the country, he bent his shoulder to the burden, and became a toiling serf." 156 However, the wild ass, with whom Joseph is compared, is viewed quite positively. Jacob predicts that he will be firm against his attackers and will be abundantly blessed.157

The comparison of Dan to a snake, the animal viewed so negatively in the Paradise story, remains cryptic: "Dan shall be a serpent by the road, a viper by the path, that bites the horse' heels so that his rider is thrown backward." 158

Other sons who compared to animals are Naphtali ("a hind let loose, which yields lovely fawns" 159) and Benjamin ("a ravenous wolf; in the morning he consumes the foe, and in the evening he divides the spoil" 160).

Pollution

Pollution – with its religious connotations – is referred to on several occasions. Sometimes it overlaps with the concept pollution as we understand it today, on other occasions it does not, as will be seen below. In one of Ezekiel's visions, clean water coming from the Temple and gushing from the south wall will purify polluted water: “This
water,’ he told me, ‘runs out to the eastern region, and flows into the Aravah; and when it comes into the sea, into the sea of foul waters, the water will become wholesome. Every living creature that swarms will be able to live wherever this stream goes; the fish will be very abundant once these waters have reached there. It will be wholesome, and everything will live wherever this stream goes. Fishermen shall stand beside it all the way from Ein-Gedi to Ein-Elgaim; it shall be a place for drying nets; and the fish will be of various kinds [and] most plentiful, like the fish of the Great Sea. But its swamps and marshes shall not become wholesome; they will serve to [supply] salt. All kinds of trees for food will grow up on both banks of the stream. Their leaves will not wither nor their fruit fail; they will yield new fruit every month, because the water for them flows from the Temple. Their fruit will serve for food and their leaves for healing.’” 161

The story of the destruction of the golden calf shows how one may rid oneself of ‘spiritual pollution’ in a stream. This is best expressed in the Hertz translation of the Bible: “And I took your sin, the calf which ye had made, and burnt it with fire, and beat it in pieces, grinding it very small, until it was as fine as dust; and I cast the dust thereof into the brook that descended out of the mount.” 162 (In the modern environmental sense, there is no pollution, as gold is inert matter.) Similarly, King Josiah tears down his predecessors’ altars of idolatry: “He removed them quickly from there and scattered their rubble in the Kidron Valley.” 163 As contemporary Jerusalemites know, this valley turns into a brook in rainy seasons.

In a poetic form, this motif returns in one of Micah’s prophecies: “He will takes us back in love; He will cover up our iniquities, You will hurl all our sins into the depths of the sea.” 164

The relationship between human wickedness and pollution (as well as destruction) is a familiar Biblical motif. (This idea was developed in rabbinical literature, and is analyzed in some detail in Chapter Five.) In the story of Paradise, the embodiment of perfection and harmony, there is no mention of decay. The story of Noah and the Flood is the paradigm of sin’s leading to natural disaster. God tells Abraham that, had there been ten just people in the city of wickedness, Sodom, He would have been willing to save it from destruction. 165 Another Divine measure for punishing the Egyptians, the sixth plague consists of air pollution from furnace soot: it causes boils. 166

Spiritual pollution is transferable as if it were tangible. This is most powerfully expressed when the community’s sin and guilt are removed by symbolically transferring them to a goat. The animal is
then expelled from society by sending it to Azazel, a place whence it cannot return to the camp.\textsuperscript{167}

The narrative on King Yehu links idolatry to human excrement. He orders his guards and officers to destroy the pillar of Baal: "And they tore down the temple of Baal and turned it into latrines, as is still the case." \textsuperscript{168}

In his first vision, the prophet Isaiah speaks of how Jerusalem has become a sinful city in which "silver has turned into dross".\textsuperscript{169} However, when he foresees that God will turn the city again into a faithful one, where "rebels and sinners shall all be crushed",\textsuperscript{170} he uses a metaphor from the world of waste management, and adds that God will "smelt out your dross as with lye, and remove all your slag".\textsuperscript{171, 172}

Another text from Isaiah can be interpreted as referring to punishment for either physical or moral pollution, or both: "The earth is withered, sear; ... For the earth was defiled under its inhabitants; because they transgressed teachings, violated laws, broke the ancient covenant. That is why a curse consumes the earth, and its inhabitants pay the penalty; That is why earth's dwellers have dwindled, and but few men are left." \textsuperscript{173}

Another pollution-related motif is given in the Book of Kings. "The men of the town said to Elisha, 'Look, the town is a pleasant place to live in, as my lord can see; but the water is bad and the land causes bereavement.' He responded, 'Bring me a new dish and put salt in it.' They brought it to him; he went to the spring and threw salt into it. And he said, 'Thus said the Lord: "I heal this water; no longer shall death and bereavement come from it!"' " \textsuperscript{174} In a modern environmental sense, putting salt in water would be considered pollution. This illustrates once again that the contemporary notion of pollution does not necessarily coincide with the Biblical one.

II. Commentators

Having thus discussed several of the Bible's stories, I will now devote attention to some aspects of modern environmental interpretation of the Bible both in contemporary Jewish publications and by Jewish Bible commentators.

Modern publications

Modern Jewish writers seldom analyze systematically the non-halakhic sections of the Bible for their ecological meaning. If they do refer to these passages it is usually incidental, or in a passing remark on the narrative. So Arthur Waskow reads that "the mistake of Eden, which is the act of eating wrongly that which comes from
the earth, results in a history of winning food from the earth only from toil and sweat, as the earth sprouts thorns and thistles.” 175

David S. Shapiro offers the following interpretation of the passage “The Lord God formed man from the dust of the earth.” 176: “The earth is not only the seat of man’s activities and that of other creatures; it is not only the medium of their sustenance. It is the very source of man’s existence as well as that of the other land-animals... The earth is the mother of man, from which he emerged and to which he will ultimately return.” 177

Jeff Sultar answers the question of whether man is part of or distinct from nature with the following exegesis: “That humans and soil are of one substance is expressed by the Hebrew words for each: adam for 'human', adamah for 'ground'. Into this ground, God blew the breath of life and created a living being. Humans were still soil, but suddenly much more – both of and beyond the soil. To provide companionship for Adam, God molded animals. While humans and animals are linked – both are conceived in adamah – no animal was a suitable partner for Adam, for though he was part of the rest of Creation, he was also distinct from it.” 178

Jeremy Cohen is one of the few exceptions among modern Jewish writers: his book on Genesis 1:28, systematically covers an environmentally relevant Bible text with both legal and narrative aspects.179

Another exception is Robert Gordis’s ecological interpretation of the “Speeches of the Lord out of the Whirlwind” in the Book of Job.180 For Gordis, this text express God’s creative will, made “without any reference to man’s desires or needs, or even his existence.” 181 It is not the detailed description of nature’s elements which is relevant, but rather what can be learned from God’s pride in it. This is true for inanimate nature as well as for the seven animals later described in the passage. He points out that, according to the text, these have been created to fulfill God’s purpose for reasons only known to Him. Man may enjoy them but they were not created specifically for his benefit. Gordis infers from the text that this Biblical book expresses a religio-ethical basis for ecology. All God’s creatures have a right to the earth and as such, man should not abuse them.

Gordis seems to be well aware that his interpretation is not explicitly stated in the text. He therefore hedges when drawing his conclusions which, from a literal reading, seem to be more Gordis than Job: “If our understanding of the meaning of the Speeches of the Lord is valid, the Book of Job offers a religious foundation for the inherent rights of animals as co-inhabitants of the earth, adumbrated two millennia earlier than the emergence of secular ethics. By insisting on a God-centered world, to which man’s title is conditional,
the Book of Job presents a basis in religion for opposing and ultimately eliminating the needless destruction of life and the pollution of the natural resources in the world.”

Jewish Bible commentators

Another source for a better understanding of Judaism’s attitude toward the environment are the Jewish Bible commentators and, most particularly, the classical ones. While we have to derive the general picture from the Bible texts themselves, as set out above, several secular environmentalist concepts – which have become explicitly expressed in our time – are already present in the texts of these religious commentators from earlier centuries.

As specific examples of this approach, the main focus here will be on Jewish commentators on three of the Biblical stories with environmental aspects, the last two of were already mentioned above: Creation, the Flood and the Ten Plagues.

Reference will often be made to Rashi. He largely focuses on the plain (literal) meaning of the text (peshat). Furthermore, his commentary has predominated in Jewish tradition, not only compared to those of other commentators but often also in comparison to the rabbinic sources which he quotes.

Creation

In the classical Jewish commentaries on the Creation story, we often find sides of the debate as to the purpose of the creation of the earth and nature. With regard to the opening verse of the Bible, “When God began to create heaven and earth – the earth being unformed and void”, Me'am Lo'ez states that the Torah is the foundation of the world. Everything in heaven and earth was created for the Torah, which is the real meaning of this beginning. (He adds that the only reason that the Jews have been created is to keep the Torah. Thus, before they study the Torah, they must first recite a blessing before God.)

For Hirsch, this first verse evokes the comment of a Divine order which should not be perturbed. Not only is the world in general and its order a world of God’s, but also each individual being. Woe to those who destroy His world; hail to those who maintain it.

“God said, ‘Let there be an expanse in the midst of the water, that it may separate water from water.’ ” On this passage, the 16th century commentator Moses Alschech comments that the physical world relates to the spiritual world, and abstract matter is compressed in such a way that it becomes compatible with physical matter. The earth had to be fluid initially, in order to be able to receive the
spiritual outpourings from the abstract Heaven. Only spiritual force prevents the natural disintegration of the material.

Referring to Genesis 1:10, “God called the dry land Earth, and the gathering of waters He called Seas. And God saw that this was good”, Nachmanides develops his concept of the God-man-nature relationship. All elements were created for the earth to be a habitation for man as, among the lower creatures, only man recognizes the Creator. Nachmanides expresses the view that the whole purpose of nature’s creation is for man to acknowledge God.

The 16th century commentator Sforno relates this Bible text to one from Isaiah: “For thus saith the Lord, The Creator of heaven who alone is God, Who formed the earth and made it, Who alone established it – He did not create it a waste, but formed it for habitation: ‘I am the Lord, and there is none else’.” The reason why God gathered the waters and brought the dry land forward, was to realize His intention of creating good for the world and those who live in it.

Hirsch interprets the end of the verse to mean that, not only did God create the world, but He re-evaluated it and found the natural order in accordance with His purposes.

Basing his ideas principally on rabbinic sources, Rashi comments on the text “the Lord God formed man from the dust of the earth”:

he states that the dust from which man was created was brought together from all over the earth, so that the earth everywhere would later accept him for burial. This Midrash seems to indicate the strong link between animated man and the inanimate earth.

Detailed reference to the commentaries on Genesis 1:28 is made in Chapter Two.

A pollution motif emerges in Rashi’s commentary on the following text: “You shall be more cursed than the ground which opened its mouth to receive your brother’s blood from your hand.” Modern environmentalism would not consider the earth’s absorption of a murdered person’s blood as physical pollution, because it is organic material. Rashi considered it pollution in a religious sense. He says that the earth will be cursed once again, due to its willingness to absorb the blood of Abel whom Cain has murdered. (The earth had already been cursed earlier: “Cursed be the ground because of you; by toil shall you eat of it all the days of your life.”) Here again there is divergence between the modern environmentalist’s concept of pollution and the traditional viewpoint of Judaism.

The Flood

“The earth became corrupt before God; the earth was filled with lawlessness.” In reference to this verse from Genesis, the Zohar
quotes R. Chiyya: he says that when men are righteous and observe God's laws, the earth becomes stronger. The reason for this is that the Divine majesty rests upon the earth, causing gladness both above and below. A similar, but secular, view is behind the environmentalist approach, saying that if we treat nature well, it will not deteriorate.

The following verse in the story of the Flood is difficult to explain: "When God saw how corrupt the earth was, for all flesh had corrupted its ways on earth." The obvious difficulty in the text is, what does 'all flesh' mean? We can understand that man was wicked, but why were the animals corrupt? Rashi is concise: "‘All flesh’ – even cattle, wild animals and birds – were (sexually) in need of – other kinds."

This commentary is based on a much older Jewish tradition. It refers to a passage from the Talmud where the same Bible text is explained: "R. Yochanan said: ‘This teaches us that man paired cattle with wild animals, and wild animals and cattle, and all of these with man, and man with all of these.’ R. Abba Bar-Kahana said: ‘All [animals] have later abandoned these [practices] except for the t'salmi.’"

These ideas express the same concern for chastity and constancy of species which is found in Halakha.

Rashi's Talmud-based explanation is by no means the only one. Nachmanides mentions this passage, but considers the scripture simply to say that ‘all flesh’ means ‘all people’.

Rashi also gives an environmentally relevant explanation for the next verse: "God said to Noah, ‘I have decided to put an end to all flesh, for the earth is filled with lawlessness because of them: I am about to destroy them with the earth.’" He comments on the phrase ‘an end to all flesh’: “Everywhere one finds lewdness, a pestilence comes over the world, and kills both the good and the bad.”

Today we might translate this into a secular environmentalist version: the environmental transgressions of some people will cause havoc to the world in general (for example, burning the rain forests will cause global warming). This is another example of the traditional Jewish motif of sin leading to disease (a subject dealt with in Chapter Five.)

“But I will establish My covenant with you, and you shall enter the ark, with your sons, your wife, and your sons' wives.” Basing the reasoning for his interpretation on the way the sentence is structured, i.e. as it seemingly separates the males from the females and doesn't say 'you and your wife, your sons and their wives', Rashi reiterates the rabbinic idea that intercourse was forbidden in the Ark.

Me'am Lo'ez extends this comment by saying that sexual relations are forbidden in times of tragedy. This is a further indication of the
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view that ‘be fertile and multiply’ is not an absolute command for all situations.  

Animals in the ark

Several other environmental motifs appear in the commentaries. So, Noah sends out the raven from the ark, who goes and returns until the water has dried up from the earth. Rashi adds a quotation referring to the future usefulness of the raven when, in the days of Elijah, he brings the prophet bread and meat. This explains further the meaning of maintaining biodiversity: each seemingly useless animal has a function in God’s creation, a recurrent motif in the Midrash.

Furthermore, there is some indication in the commentaries that Judaism views animals in the wild more positively than those in captivity. Rashi comments on this with regard to the verse: “The dove came back to him toward evening, and there in its bill was a plucked-off olive leaf! Then Noah knew that the waters had decreased on the earth. He waited still another seven days and sent the dove forth; and it did not return to him any more.”

According to Rashi, the olive leaf is apparently very bitter. Basing his comment on the Midrash, he interprets the dove’s words to mean: “Let my food be bitter as an olive from the hands of God, and not sweet as honey from the hands of humans.”

With regard to the relationship between religion and environment, another relevant comment refers to the sacrifices which Noah offers to God after he leaves the ark: “Then Noah built an altar to the Lord and, taking of every clean animal and of every clean bird, he offered burnt offerings on the altar.” Here Rashi quotes Noah, who says that the only reason why God tells him to take seven pairs of these animals into the ark is in order to be able to make a sacrifice of them. Once again, this is an expression of theocentricity: the ‘extra’ animals are not saved because they are ritually clean, and will later be specifically allowed to be eaten by the Israelites; their inclusion in the ark is interpreted as an availability for sacrifice, which the unclean animals are unfit for. It is for this reason that only one pair of the latter is taken into the ark.

Eating meat

After the Flood, man is allowed to eat meat for the first time: “Every creature that lives shall be yours to eat; as with the green grasses, I give you all these.” Me'am Lo'ez believes that this verse reflects a radical change in the relationship between man and animal. He explains that, after Adam’s sin, the animals are no longer willing to accept man’s author-
ity. He claims that man can no longer plow because the ox refuses to obey the farmer’s instructions. In Noah’s time, man regains his authority over animals, who now fear him (partly because he is now allowed to slaughter and eat them): “The fear and dread of you shall be upon all the beasts of the earth and upon all the birds of the sky – everything with which the earth is astir – and upon all the fish of the sea; they are given into your hand.”

Me’am Lo’ez also claims that the reason why Noah is permitted to eat flesh, whereas Adam is not, is that before the Flood, the animals have not derived any advantage from man. However, as it is due to Noah that humanity and animals survive in the ark, he has now acquired rights over the animals and thus is allowed to kill and eat them.

The Ten Plagues

Commentators on the story of the Ten Plagues also make a number of observations of relevance to the present subject. One verse which these comments refer to is: “The Lord said to Moses and Aaron, ‘When Pharaoh speaks to you and says, “Produce your marvel”, you shall say to Aaron, “Take your rod and cast it down before Pharaoh.” It shall turn into a serpent.’ ”

Here, the Zohar quotes R. Eleazar, who refers to a double modification of nature. He says that God performs two miracles with Aaron’s rod, a piece of dry wood: for a brief time, it is converted into a living being, and it swallows the serpents of the Egyptians.

The second plague befalling the Egyptians consists of frogs. The Midrash here quotes R. Acha, son of R. Hanina, who explains that each part of God’s creation fulfills a role. He refers to those prophets who initially refuse to obey God’s order to prophesy, and says that He can use serpents, scorpions or frogs in their stead. He also refers to the Bible text mentioned above, where God announces the use of hornets.

In order to be exempt from the last plague – the slaying of the first-born – the Israelites are told to put lamb’s blood on the door-posts and lintels of their houses: “For that night I will go through the land of Egypt and strike down every first-born in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and I will mete out punishment to all the gods of Egypt, I the Lord. And the blood on the houses where you are staying shall be a sign for you: when I see the blood I will pass over you, so that no plague will destroy you when I strike the land of Egypt.”

Alschech sees in this a variation on the idea of animal sacrifice, where the blood of the animal replaces the human blood. God accepts the animal sacrifice as a substitute for the taking of human life. In the specific case of the tenth plague, the blood on the door-
posts should be considered an act of atonement for the Jews' having participated in the worship of lamb idols.  

The lowly hyssop

Plants also fulfill functions in God's design of the world. Even a plant as humble as the hyssop is given an important task. Before the tenth plague Moses tells the elders: "Take a bunch of hyssop, dip it in the blood that is in the basin, and apply some of the blood that is in the basin to the lintel and to the two doorposts." As mentioned, these houses will be passed over when the firstborn in the land of Egypt are killed.

The Midrash says that, in the eyes of man, the hyssop seems to be a lowly plant of no worth. This is also expressed in a text in which it seems to be considered the extreme opposite of the mighty cedar. So it is written about King Solomon: "He discoursed about trees, from the cedar in Lebanon to the hyssop that grows out of the wall."  

The Midrash explains that God redeems Israel through the lowly hyssop. It also fulfills a role on several other occasions, such as in the purification of the leper and the burning of the red heifer. The message is that God performs miracles even with things that seem to be of little or no importance.

Conclusions

Many insights can be gained from reading the Bible from the viewpoint of the modern environmental discipline. The above analysis deals with only a very partial view of the Biblical narrative's potential contribution to the development of a Jewish attitude toward the environment. The one issue on which a broad perspective emerges here is nature's role in God's creation. As the Bible is so permeated with this view, which appears in so many different places, this broadens the picture already obtained from Halakha.

Furthermore, it reveals the Bible's attitude toward animals and other parts of the ecosystem, a subject which can be considerably enlarged by further research. From the examples given of Jewish interpretative commentary on the Bible verses, possible origins of several present-day environmental motifs can be discovered. Apart from a few passing remarks on other issues, I have mainly referred to three major environmental stories in the Bible. (Paradise, the Flood and the Ten Plagues.) It is reasonable to assume that other narratives of environmental relevance will yield further such motifs.

Several morally desirable attitudes toward nature on the part of general humanity may be inferred from the Bible's non-halakhic texts.
It is possible to conclude from these the often-expressed concept of responsible stewardship on behalf of God, but not overwhelmingly obvious. Non-halakhic Bible texts are much more open to interpretation than the Noachide commandments.²²⁷

Again, the above vision is strategic and not exhaustive. I have focused on key concepts which have assisted me in reaching my goal: to identify those elements of Biblical and post-Biblical tradition that are relevant to developing a comprehensive Jewish attitude toward environmental issues. The various methods outlined indicate that there is substantial potential for further research on the Bible's narrative texts. The same may be said for the prophetic and wisdom texts.

**Notes for Chapter Four**

1. Other methods of traditional Biblical exegesis are: *remez* (veiled allusions), *derash* (homiletic interpretation) and *sod* (mystical interpretation.)
2. Genesis Chapters 2 & 3.
4. According to Shalom Rosenberg, this passage depicts the Bible's conceptual revolution in the relationship between God and nature. God is outside nature, and creates a new morality which breaks man's enslavement to nature. Nature means the victory of the strongest. The Bible recognizes this reality but also stresses that things can be different, hence the vision of the Latter days in which wolf and lamb will graze together. Torah *veTeva*. Paper presented at the Harvard Conference on Judaism and the Natural World, February 22-24, 1998. Hebrew.
5. Isaiah 65:25.
10. Ecclesiastes 11:5.
11. This book is particularly rich in references to Nature. Yehuda Feliks writes: "The Book of Psalms is replete with wonderful poems of nature, containing hundreds of parables, similes and metaphors drawn from animal and plant life as well as from agriculture." Feliks, op. cit., p. x.
19. Psalm 93:3.
21 Psalm 19:2.
23 Psalm 104:19–20, 32.
24 Genesis 9:8–17.
26 Numbers 17:20.
27 Numbers 17:23–24.
28 It is interesting to note that the two sole animals in the Bible to be given the gift of speech are impure ones: the serpent in Genesis, chapter 3, and the donkey in this story. While we are told that the donkey’s speech is only a temporary phenomenon, we do not know whether the serpent’s facility is permanent.
30 II Kings 5:14.
34 Joel 2:24–6.
35 Hosea 2:20.
36 Genesis, Chapters 18 & 19.
39 Jeremiah 15:3.
40 I Kings 14:11.
41 I Kings 16:4.
43 Exodus, Chapters 7–12.
44 Exodus 7:21.
45 Exodus 9:10–11.
46 Exodus 7:8–10.
47 Exodus 8:12–13.
48 Exodus 7:28.
49 Exodus 8:9–10.
50 Exodus 8:15–14.
51 Exodus 9:10.
52 Exodus 9:25.
53 Exodus 9:3.
54 Exodus 10:22–23.
55 Exodus 10:15.
56 Exodus 14:21–22.
57 Exodus 14:27.
58 Numbers 16:30.
59 Numbers 16:31–33.
61 Genesis, Chapters 6, 7, & 8.
62 Genesis 8:21–22.
63 This promise still leaves the earth vulnerable to destruction: it is not a Divine promise to save the earth from an asteroid, for example.
64 Genesis 9:15.
65 Isaiah 54:9–10.
67 Genesis 9:11.
68 Joshua 10:12.
70 Joshua 6:20.
71 I Kings 18:21.
72 I Kings 18:38.
73 I Kings 18:45.
74 Jonah 1:4.
75 Jonah 2:1.
76 Jonah, Chapters 1–4.
77 Jonah 4:6–8.
78 Ezekiel 21:3.
79 Ezekiel 21:8–9.
80 Ezekiel 31:3.
81 Ezekiel 31:12.
82 Jeremiah 17:7–8.
83 Psalms 1:1, 3–4.
84 Jeremiah 2:2: "Go proclaim to Jerusalem: Thus said the Lord: I accounted to your favor the devotion of your youth, your love as a bride — how you followed Me in the wilderness, in a land not sown."
85 Hosea 9:10: "I found Israel [as pleasing] as grapes in the wilderness: your fathers seemed to Me like the first fig to ripen on a fig tree. But when they came to Baal-peor, they turned aside to shamefulness; then they became as detested as they had been loved."
86 Amos 5:25: "Did you offer sacrifice and oblation to Me those forty years in the wilderness, O House of Israel?"
87 Ezekiel 36:33–35: "Thus said the Lord God: 'When I have cleansed you of all your iniquities, I will people your settlements, and the ruined places shall be rebuilt; and the desolate land, after lying waste in the sight of every passerby, shall again be tilled. And men shall say, 'That land, once desolate, has become like the Garden of Eden; and the cities, once ruined, desolate, and ravaged, are now populated and fortified.' "
89 Deuteronomy 12:2–3.
90 II Kings 23:5.
91 I Kings 14:23.
92 II Kings 16:4.
93 II Kings 17:6–10.
94 Isaiah 57:4–5.
95 Ezekiel 6:13.
96 Exodus 16:14.
97 Exodus 16:21.
99 Exodus 17:5–6.
100 Numbers 20:8.
101 Numbers 20:11.
102 Isaiah 41:18.
103 Isaiah 43:20.
104 Numbers 11:4-6.
105 Numbers 11:33-34.
107 Genesis 21:30.
111 See Genesis, Chapters 18 & 19.
112 Genesis 26:19-21.
113 Genesis, Chapter 41.
114 From an economic viewpoint, this shows an understanding of the price theory, based on supply and demand. When the grain is abundant, prices are low; when it becomes scarce, prices sky-rocket. This enables the Pharaoh to become even wealthier than before. The political might of Egypt increases as neighboring countries become dependent on Egyptian grain supplies.
115 On some occasions in the Bible the limited resources of an individual are extended through a miracle, as in the story of the prophet Elijah and the widow who provides him with food. I Kings 17:7-16. A similar story about the prophet Elisha, is told in II Kings 4:1-7.
116 Deuteronomy 8:9.
117 Joshua 17:15.
118 Joshua 17:18.
119 Genesis 3:19.
120 Ezekiel, 37:4-6.
121 Exodus 32:2-4.
122 Exodus 35:22.
123 Exodus, Chapters 36-39.
125 Jeremiah 1:10.
126 We also know that Israel’s enemies carried out destructive activities: “After the Israelites had done their sowing, Midian, Amalek, and the Kedemites would come up and raid them; they would attack them, destroy the produce of the land all the way to Gaza, and leave no means of sustenance in Israel, not a sheep or an ox or an ass.” Judges 6:3-4.
127 II Kings 3:19ff. According to tradition, prophets are empowered to command an ad hoc violation of a Biblical commandment.
129 Judges 9:43.
130 II Chronicles 32:2-4.
131 Genesis, Chapter 22.
133 Ecclesiastes 3:19-21.
134 Genesis 18:27.
135 Job 30:19.
137 Numbers 28:1-8 and Leviticus 1:11. (Similarly, the text referring to the Shabbat offering is added on Shabbat – Numbers 28:9-10; the Bible verses referring to the New Moon offering are added on the appropriate day - Numbers 28:11-15.)
138 Hosea 14:3.
139 Exodus 23:28. The JPS translation notes that the Hebrew text is unclear, and that the word can mean either 'plague' or 'hornets'.

140 I Kings 17:1.
141 I Kings 17:4.
142 I King 17:6.
143 Job 12:7–8.
144 Genesis, Chapter 34.
146 Numbers 23:32–33.
147 Genesis 24:12–14.
149 Genesis 6:7.
151 Ezekiel 34:18–19.
152 Jonah 3:7–9.
153 Jonah 4:10–11.
154 Genesis Chapter 49.
155 Genesis 49:8–12.
158 Genesis 49:17.
159 Genesis 49:21.
160 Genesis 49:27.
161 Ezekiel 47:8–12.
162 Deuteronomy 9:21 (Hertz translation).
163 II Kings 23:12.
164 Micah 7:19.

165 The Talmud records the opinion of Rabba, son of Bar Hana, that “the soul of one righteous person is equivalent to the whole world.” Bavli Sanhedrin, 103b.

166 Exodus 9–11. In his commentary on this text, M. D. Cassuto says that furnace soot symbolized the hard work of the Jewish workers who burned bricks from straw for the Egyptian builders. The soot remained on the furnace walls. Cassuto adds: “thus it was just that this soot, which resulted as it were from the sweat of the oppressed, should bring punishment on the flesh of the oppressors.” M. D. Cassuto, Commentary on the Book of Exodus. Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1959, p. 76. Hebrew.

167 See Leviticus Chapter 16. In Talmudic times, the animal was hurled off a rock, as it was apparently no longer possible to send it to a place whence it could not return to civilization.

168 Kings II 10:27.
169 Isaiah 1:22.
170 Ibid., 1:28.
171 Ibid., 1:25.

172 When the Nazi Adolf Eichmann was condemned to death, his body was burned and the ashes dispersed by boat over the sea, outside the territorial waters of Israel. This highly symbolic act of ‘removing pollution’ from Israel’s boundaries is unique in the State’s history.

173 Isaiah 24:4–6.
174 II Kings 2:19–22.


181 Gordis, ibid., p. 195.

182 Ibid., p. 200.

183 Genesis 1:1.

184 Rabbi Yaakov Culi (1689–1732), considered an important rabbinical authority in many Sephardi circles. His commentary is written in Ladino.

185 Hirsch commentary on Genesis 1:1.

186 Genesis 1:6.

187 Moses Ben Chayim Alshech, (born in Adrianople in 1508; died in Damascus circa 1600), was an important Talmud scholar and Bible commentator.

188 Ovadyah from Sforno, a medical doctor and scientist, was born in Cesena between 1470 and 1475 and died in Bologna around 1550.

189 Isaiah 45:18.

190 Genesis 2:7.

191 Bavli *Sanhedrin* 38a and *Tanbuma* (Warschau edition) *Pekude* 3.

192 Genesis 4:11.

193 Rashi on Genesis 4:11.

194 Genesis 3:17. See also Rashi on Genesis 1:11.

195 Genesis 6:11.

196 Zohar on Genesis 6:11.

197 Genesis 6:12.

198 Rashi on Genesis 6:12.

199 Bavli *Sanhedrin* 108a. The *tusalmi* is apparently a bird which pairs with others not of its own kind.

200 Nachmanides on Genesis 6:12.

201 Genesis 6:13.

202 Genesis Rabba 26:5 (Wilna ed.). The translation 'pestilence' is the one adopted in the Dutch Rashi-translation of Onderwijzer.

203 Genesis 6:18.

204 Genesis Rabba 31:12 (Wilna ed.)

205 Me'am Lo'ez on Genesis 6:18.

206 Genesis 8:7.

207 1 Kings 17:6. "The ravens brought him bread and meat every morning and every evening, and he drank from the wadi." Rashi quotes here Genesis Rabba (Wilna ed.) 33:5.

208 Genesis 8:11–12.

209 Rashi on Genesis 8:11. The original Midrash appears in Bavli *Eruvin* 18b in the name of R. Yirmiya Ben-Elazar. A similar text is also found in Bavli *Sanhedrin* 109b in the name of R. Elazar.

210 Genesis 8:20.

211 Rashi on Genesis 8:20. The quote is from Genesis Rabba (Wilna ed.) 34:9.
212. Genesis 9:3.
214. Ibid.
216. Exodus Rabba 10:1 (Wilna ed.)
217. We know from the Bible that this was the case with Moses, Jeremiah and Jonah.
227. The Midrash gives additional insights into what Judaism thinks mankind's attitude toward the environment should be. It also reflects here a sphere of thought which is far from attitudes of 'destruction for pleasure'.
Chapter Five

Additional Environmental Motifs in Classical Jewish Literature

This chapter analyzes some additional environmental motifs from classical Jewish religious literature. This is a field which requires major further exploration, and the examples given here are indicative of the potential wealth of environmental material in classical Jewish texts.

Many such motifs appear in the Midrash Aggadah, the non-halakhic elements of rabbinical interpretation of scripture. (The word Midrash is used in two ways: firstly, for a method of religious explanation of the Bible; secondly, for halakhic and aggadic writings which use this complex method of exegesis.)

No systematic attempt has yet been made to review the Aggadah for its potential relevance to the current subject. Neither will I attempt to categorize contemporary Jewish writers’ views on how ethical expressions in classical Jewish sources relate to environmental issues. Only a brief reference to both issues will be made below.

The Midrash and environmental elements

It has been demonstrated in the previous chapters that Halakha and Bible stories can be related to environmental matters: so can the Midrash motifs which will be discussed in this chapter.

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Preservation of natural resources:  Conspicuous consumption
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filth and decay
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Contradictory explanations

One Midrash stresses the importance of man’s position in Creation
in two explanations as to why man was only created on the sixth
day: “The rabbis said: ‘man was created on the day before Shabbat’.
Thus the heretics could not say that the Lord had a partner in creation.
Another explanation: The purpose was that when he became arro­
gant, one could say to him that even the mosquito had been created
before him.”

The Aggadah lends itself to multiple, varied, and sometimes contra­
dictory, interpretations which have expanded over the centuries.
This becomes clear from modern Jewish, writings, where individual
writers may emphasize diverse aspects of a text as it is interpreted
today. One environmental Midrash that is often quoted is: “God said
to Adam: ‘see my works, see how pleasant and good they are:
Everything I have created I have created for you. Be careful not to
spoil and destroy my world. If you do so no one will repair it.’”

Yehudah Levi argues that this Midrash means that the Torah “views
Man as being entrusted with the orderly and proper management of
the world. Therefore we may not stand aside and watch the world
being destroyed.”

Steven Schwarzschild, who openly expresses a dislike for nature,
reflects laconically that this text proves there is nothing ‘wrong’ with
trees, and that it provides the normative purpose why God pointed
them out to Adam in the Garden of Eden.

Bradley Shavit Artson writes: “Our distinction as a people, our
very claim to preeminence in the world, rests on our ability to distin­
guish good from evil, to restrain our desires, to consider the whole
and the holy.”

Mordechai Liebling claims “This Midrash contains an inherent con­
tradiction, stressing on one hand a vision of creation that exists for
the sake of humanity, and on the other hand a view of creation as
a Divine unfolding, with its own value.”

The philosopher Lenn Goodman interprets the text differently:
“Here, working at the heart of the teleological and anthropocentric
conception of nature, for which the monotheistic tradition is so
often blamed, we find God commending His creation to humanity, not for its utility or commodiousness but for its beauty. And the rhetorical suasion brought to bear, by way of imparting a sense of responsibility for nature to humankind, in the person of Adam, is not the prudential concern that one must not foul one’s own nest or pollute the well one drinks from but the appeal of the preciousness and irreplaceability of each of God’s creations – whose paradigms are the trees in Eden.”

For Everett Gendler, the question is what guidance it gives for our contemporary decisions. To him, the Midrash is “a beautifully articulated appreciation of the loveliness of our natural inheritance; here, also, is clearly stated the demand that we care for and treat our planet with consideration. Reading it, can one help but ask what this might mean when we read about the destruction of the world’s rain forests? Or what should be our responses to issues concerning the treatment of our own national parks and forests?”

In my view, this Midrash also shows that ancient Jewish thought already considered the possibility of man’s one day having the potential to destroy much of the Earth which God had created. This argument returned in a modern, secular form in the discussion about a possible nuclear holocaust.

The modification of nature

In the previous chapter, a number of cases are mentioned where God modifies nature – or at least intervenes in it at a very significant moment – to reward or punish. Such miracles are also mentioned occasionally in the Mishnah and Talmud, in connection to post-Biblical figures. The following cases mention the modification of nature to reward meritorious people.

In the Mishnah it is told that when there was no rain, the people went to a sage, Honi the Circle-Drawer, and asked him to pray for rain. He then said: “Put your ovens for the Pesach holiday into the house, so that they won’t melt.” He prayed, but no rain came down. Then he drew a circle and stood in it, and said: “Lord of the world, Your children have put their hopes on me because I am like Your house-guest. I swear by Your name that I will not move from here until you show mercy upon Your children.” Then drops of rain started to fall. Honi said that this wasn’t what he had asked for, but rather for rain which would fill the wells. Then the rain came down violently. Honi said that he had not asked for this, but for benevolent rain. Then the rain fell in an orderly way.

Once, when the Israelites came to Jerusalem on pilgrimage, they had no water to drink. One of the town’s rich men, Nikodemon
Ben-Gorion went to one of the rulers and borrowed water from him. He promised that, if he did not return the water before a given time, he would pay him twelve talents of silver. When no water fell in time and the ruler asked for his money, Ben-Gorion prayed; the sun went back up into the sky, and rain fell so that he could redeem his loan.\textsuperscript{10}

Another such miracle is told of R. Pinhas Ben-Yair who went to redeem some captives. On his way, he came to the River Ginai, which he could not ford. He told the river to divide so that he could cross. The river refused, saying that while the rabbi was on his way to carry out the will of his Creator, this was also what the river was doing. However, while it was doubtful whether the rabbi would be able to carry out his mission, there was no doubt that the river was carrying out his own. The rabbi then said: ‘If you do not divide yourself, I will make it your destiny that no water will ever flow through you again.’ Upon which, the river divided itself.\textsuperscript{11}

\textit{Learning and nature}

Jeremy Benstein has reviewed how Jewish commentators over the centuries have given interpretations of a moral teaching from the Mishnah: “R. Jacob said, ‘He who is walking by the way and rehearses what he has learnt, and breaks off from his rehearsing and says, “how fine is that tree, how fine is that field”, him the Scripture regards as if he were guilty against himself.” \textsuperscript{12}

He points to the many classical commentators – including Abrabanel – who interpret this Mishnah to mean that studying Torah takes priority over admiring nature, without meaning that nature should be denigrated.\textsuperscript{13} He compares this approach with that of the 19\textsuperscript{th} century rabbi, Yosef Hayyim Caro, who interprets the same Mishnah as meaning that, while nature is always visible as a sign of God’s creation, the Torah’s revelation is not, and thus special attention must be given to it.

Benstein then quotes Schwarzschild, who views in a positive light Jews’ alienation from nature over the centuries, and adds: “it is no surprise... to find that our Mishnah is Schwarzschild’s ‘favorite text’.” \textsuperscript{14}

\textit{Sacredness and decay}

Many motifs which have emerged in today’s environmental discussions are already found in the \textit{Aggadah}. Some of these were mentioned earlier in this study, in the discussion on Bible texts. The motif that man is dust is developed in the Mishnah \textit{Avot}: “Akavya son of Mahalel says: ‘reflect about three things which will keep you away from sin... you come from a stinking drop, you are going to a place
of dust.' " The third point he mentions is that man will have to account for his deeds before God. Thus the sage stresses that an affinity with dust is not man’s only important characteristic.  

One group of motifs illustrates various links between abstract concepts such as sacredness and righteousness, and concrete issues such as decay, pollution, putrefaction, destruction, disease, death and natural disaster. Several examples from the Bible were given in the previous chapter.

Spirituality is linked to the absence of noise. The Midrash says that there was no noise at all when the Torah was given on Sinai: “Said R. Abahu in the name of R. Yohanan: ‘When God gave the Torah birds didn’t chirp or fly, no oxen mooed, angels did not fly or say “holy, holy”, the sea didn’t shake, humans didn’t speak, the world was quiet and silent.’ Then the voice came: ‘I the Lord am your God.’ ”

Pollution and filth are linked to a lack of spirituality. For example, in the Mishnah Avot, R. Simeon states: “If three have eaten at a table and have spoken there no words of Torah, it is as if they had eaten of sacrifices to dead idols, of whom it is said, ‘For all their tables are full of vomit and filthiness’; the All-present is not (in their thoughts). But if three have eaten at a table and have spoken there words of Torah, it is as if they had eaten at the table of the All-present, to which the Scripture may be applied, And he said unto me, ‘This is the table that is before the Lord.’ ”

In the same tractate, it is pointed out that pestilence hits especially hard at four specific moments of each seven-year period. This occurrence is related to transgressions of various social/religious laws, such as selling the produce of the sabbatical year, when what has grown should only be consumed by the owner's household and by the poor.

In the Talmud it is written that various shortcomings of the legal system – such as the postponement of sentences, corruption of justice, the tribunal’s carelessness, and neglect of the Torah – lead to the “multiplication of sword and robbery, the outbreak of pestilence and drought, while people eat without appeasing their hunger.”

The sage R. Papa interprets a verse in the Song of Songs to mean that whoever derides the sages will be punished with boiling excrement. Also, before the Israelites are given laws related to food they are compared to hens picking in the dirt.

The following Midrash relates how immoral behavior on environmental issues leads to cosmic disaster: “The Rabbis taught... because of four transgressions will the heavenly bodies suffer eclipse: because of forged documents, because of false testimony, because of flocks..."
of goats and sheep in the land of Israel, and because of the felling of good trees.” 25

Various related motifs appear in classical Jewish literature. Joseph Soloveitchik, one of the most important Jewish thinkers of this century, writes that the idea that sin and sickness are the same is already found in the Bible. He interprets the following text from Psalms 103: 1-4 along the same lines: “Bless the Lord, O my soul and do not forget all His bounties. He forgives all your sins, heals all your diseases, He redeems your life from the Pit, surrounds you with steadfast love and mercy.” He points out that the Bible precedes Maimonides, who “brought out and expounded the idea that a parallel exists between sickness of the mind and sickness of the body.” 26 Soloveitchik sees in this and other texts parallels “between healing and forgiving, between iniquities and diseases.” 27

Connecting God with cleanliness

Another Mishnah underlines a mirror image of the previous motifs: how serving God leads to cleanliness. Here, then, cleanliness is both a religious and a physical concept; it only partly coincides with the concept of a clean environment as it is currently understood. In Mishnah Avot, ten miracles that God has wrought in the Temple are listed: among these, the holy flesh never becomes putrid, no fly is seen in the slaughterhouse, no serpent or scorpion ever harms anyone in Jerusalem, nor is the Temple ever overcrowded despite the multitude of worshippers. 28

Similarly, the land of Israel is presented in the Talmud as a mirror image of pollution. The sage Zera changed his position on an issue after he immigrated to Palestine, exclaiming: “the air of the Land of Israel makes wise.” 29,30 R. Yitschak appears to echo this with the statement: “The earth of Israel causes repentance.” 31 However, he is referring to an opposite phenomenon, i.e. increased interest in the commandments after the exile of the Jews to Babylon.

The angel of death is perceived to be powerless before righteous people. The Talmud relates that the angel of death comes while R. Hisda is studying in the Beit HaMidrash (house of learning). As he does not interrupt his studies, the angel cannot take his life. The angel sits on a cedar tree outside, causing it to collapse. The noise causes R. Hisda to pause in his studies, giving the angel the opportunity to take his life. 32 The Zohar offers an observation which reflects a link to these ideas: “Those who throw stinking water in front of their yard are cursed by the angels.” 33

Yet another image of pollution concerns the pig, symbol of filth in the Aggadah: “Ten measures of diseases descended on the world.
Nine of these took the pig.” This may be related to another Talmudic text where it is pointed out that the pig is considered the richest animal; Rashi explains this to mean that the animal eats everything. Such indiscriminate consumption renders the pig susceptible to many diseases.

Modern motifs

The motif of the relationship between sin, destruction and punishment reappears continuously in varying forms. In this century, one of its manifestations is in the search for theological explanations for the Holocaust.

The motif that pollution and immorality are linked appears in a secular form in the concepts of the modern profession of environmental risk communication. Peter M. Sandman, an expert in this field, states, “American society... has decided over the last two decades that pollution isn’t just harmful—it’s evil.” The moral relevance of pollution has many consequences in the relationship between polluters and the community.

Conspicuous consumption

The motif of conspicuous consumption is very relevant to modern environmentalism: this is viewed as one of the major reasons for the depletion of resources while simultaneously stimulating the production of waste.

There are several references in classical Jewish literature to this motif; however, these are made only in a general moral context, and not an environmentalist one. Mishnah Avot says: “Who is rich, the man who is happy with what he has.” In the same Mishnah tractate, gluttony is denounced by the sage Hillel: “The more flesh, the more worms.”

Similarly, the Talmudic sage R. Yehuda states that a divine voice speaks every day “from the mountain of Horev and says that the whole world is only being nourished because of my son [the righteous] Hanina; my son Hanina, however, limits himself to the eating of a kav [a measure equal to 24 eggs] of carob from one Friday to another.”

One Midrash which underlines the vanity of consumption tells the story of a fox. It found a vineyard which was fenced on all sides, with only a small hole in the barrier. He wanted to enter but could not, so he fasted three days until he lost enough weight and was thin enough to get through. He then entered, ate his fill and became fat. He now wanted to get out, but could not. So he fasted another three days until he became thin again and then squeezed his way out. Once outside,
he looked at the vineyard and said: “Vineyard how good are you and your fruits, but there is no enjoyment from you. One goes out the same way one comes in. Such is the world.”

There are also references in the Midrash to abuse of certain foods, alcohol being one of them. Opposition to conspicuous consumption also appears in later Jewish literature. In his testament, the Spanish medieval scholar Ibn Kaspi tells his son to “marry a wife of good family, beautiful in form and in character. Pay no regard to money, for true wealth consists only of a sufficiency of bread to eat and raiment to wear.”

In his final testament Judah Asheri, the rabbi of Toledo tells his children that they were brought into the world not for conspicuous consumption, but rather for the service of God.

Those who squander useful things not only transgress the law, but are also morally reprehensible. The Talmud says: “When somebody, in his anger, tears up clothes, breaks vessels, or scatters money, consider it as if he commits idolatry. This is the mastery of the evil inclination; today it says do this, tomorrow it says do something else, until it tells him to go and commit idolatry, and he will then go and do it.”

**Biodiversity**

The claim that biodiversity must be maintained and living nature respected, is an important goal of modern environmentalism. While we cannot blindly transpose environmentalist terminology to the world of the Midrash, this can be considered a secular version of the view which often appears in the Midrash: within God’s creation everything has a meaning.

The ‘biodiversity’ motif appears again in the Talmudic Midrash, in the teachings of the sage Resh Laqish. The raven tells Noah that God hates him because, as an unclean bird, only two of his kind are put in the Ark; while the clean birds came in sevens. He adds that Noah hates him too because he sends him out of the Ark as a spy, when he could just as well have sent a bird of a species of which there were seven. The raven says that if he should die of heat or cold, his species will disappear from the earth (adding to Noah, “Perhaps you desire my wife?”).

**Relationship with animals**

Animals are another subject which is given substantial attention in classical rabbinical literature. One Midrash cites Moses’ compassion toward animals as the reason he is chosen to lead the Israelites out of Egypt: “While our teacher Moses was tending the sheep of Jethro
in the wilderness a lamb ran away from him. He ran after it until it reached Hasuah. Upon reaching Hasuah it came upon a pool of water [whereupon] the lamb stopped to drink. When Moses reached it he said, 'I did not know that you were running because [you were] thirsty. You must be tired.' He placed it on his shoulder and began to walk. The Holy One, blessed be He, said, 'You are compassionate in leading flocks belonging to mortals; I swear you will similarly shepherd my flock, Israel.' "

49

The survival of the different species is indeed protected in the Ark; however, when Noah leaves the Ark, he sacrifices some of the animals. "He contemplated – 'Why did God command me to bring more pure than impure animals into the ark? – if not to offer sacrifices from them?' " 50 "He searched his heart, and said, 'God has saved me from the waters of the Flood and brought me out of that enclosure – am I not obliged to offer Him sacrifices and burnt offerings?' "

51

Another frequently quoted Midrash is from the Talmud. A calf headed for slaughter hides its head in the folds of the robe of the sage R. Yehuda the Prince. He tells the calf: "Go, because that is what you have been created for." It is then said in Heaven that, as he has no mercy, he merits punishment. On another occasion, the maidservant in the same rabbi’s employ gets rid of some young weasels while cleaning the house. The rabbi says, "Leave them alone, as 'His mercy is upon all His works' " 52 upon which it is said in Heaven that, as he has shown mercy, he will be shown mercy too.

53

Another Midrash seems to indicate that the existence of animals is only meaningful because of the existence of man. In the Talmud the question is raised as to why almost all the animal world had to be destroyed in the Flood when it was man that had sinned. A parable from the sage R. Yehoshua ben Korcha is quoted, which tells of a man who makes a canopy for his son and buys food for the wedding feast. When his son dies a few days later, the man takes the canopy apart, saying, "I only did this for my son: what good is the canopy for me now my son has died?" The parable tells that God had said that the animals had been created for man: now that man has sinned, they have become superfluous.

54

An ambivalent story about sacrifices is given in the Talmud: "When R. Sheshet had fasted, he used to say after his prayers: 'Lord of the world, it is known that at the time when the Temple still existed, a man who had sinned brought a sacrifice, of which only fat and blood were sacrificed, and he was forgiven. Now I have fasted, and my fat and blood have diminished; so maybe Your will that my fat and blood which has diminished will be considered as having been brought before You on the altar, and that I shall acquire Your good will.' " 55 This
can be construed as saying that, as sacrifices cannot be offered in our
days, one has to find metaphorical connections to the sacrifice in one's
religious actions. An opposite explanation may be possible however;
vegetarian activist, R. Schwartz, comments on this text: "Perhaps a dif­
f erent type of sacrifice is required of us today." 56

The Bible tells us that, after the prophet Elisha has cured the water
of Jericho, he goes to Bethel: "As he was going up the road, some
little boys came out of the town and jeered at him, saying, 'Go away,
baldhead! Go away, baldhead!' he turned around and looked at them
and cursed them in the name of the Lord. Thereupon, two she-bears
came out of the woods and mangled forty-two of the children." 57

The rabbis in the Talmud view the prophet's reaction very nega­
tively. They mention that he later suffered from three illnesses, the
last one of which he died from. The first illness was because "he set
the bears onto the children". One may read in this the misuse of the
prophet's powers through animals. 58

Another motif is that man can learn from different animals: "R.
Yochanan says: 'If the Torah had not been given, we would have
learned modesty from the cat [and the prohibition] of robbery from
the ant [and the prohibition] of incest from the dove and decency
from the rooster who, first caresses the [hen] and only afterwards
mates [with her].' " 59

**Midrashic sources for tree-planting**

The origins of the tree-planting organized in our time by the Jewish
National Fund can also be found in classical sources. Two Midrashim
show that the planting of trees has an almost religious meaning:

R. Yehuda ben R. Simon teaches: "It is said, 'follow the Lord, your
God.' This means follow His example. When He created the world
His first action was to plant a tree, as is written, 'and God planted
a tree in Eden.' So you, too, when you will enter the land of Israel,
make planting of trees your first business." 60

Whoever cuts down trees will be punished accordingly. The Tosefta
61 teaches: "Street vendors, breeders of small cattle and those who cut
down good trees will never see a sign of blessing." 62

One Midrash refers to the Divine commandment to build the
Tabernacle from acacia wood. 53 "Said R. Takhlifa from Caesarea:
'God taught good manners. If man wants to build a house from a
fruit tree, then tell him: 'as God, to whom everything belongs, spared
fruit trees when he commanded the tabernacle to be built, you even
more so [should not use fruit trees].' " 64

One of the sustainable development motifs appearing in modern
environmental literature is inter-generation equity. This means that
the present generation should not diminish the life-prospects of future ones. A precursor of this idea can be found in a Midrash: “King Solomon has said: ‘He brings everything to pass precisely at its time;’ Just as others planted for you, so you shall plant for your children. Therefore scripture admonishes: ‘When you will come into the land, you shall plant.’”

This Midrash also says that if God told people the date of their deaths, they would neither plant nor build, as they would not want to take so much trouble over something which would only benefit others. However, God tells them that, even if they already found the world full of good things, they should not abstain from planting.

This motif returns from a different angle. The Israelites in the desert have to use planks for building the Tabernacle. The Midrash asks where these boards come from, and answers that Jacob the forefather planted trees when he went down to Egypt, telling his sons: “My sons, in future you will be redeemed from here and then the Lord will tell you to build the Tabernacle. Thus from now on plant cedars so that when he will tell you to make Him the Tabernacle, the cedars will be ready.” They immediately started to plant.

Another Midrash tells of a rabbi who sees a man planting a carob tree: “The rabbi inquires after how many years will it bear fruit? The man says, ‘70 years.’ The rabbi then asks whether he is assured that he will live 70 years, upon which the man replies: ‘I found carobs in the world which my ancestors planted for me; similarly, I want to plant for my descendants.’”

The extreme importance of tree-planting is emphasized in another rabbinic source: “If you held a young tree to be planted in your hand and you were told that the Messiah had come, first plant the shoot and thereafter go and welcome [the Messiah],” i.e. the tree will continue to grow at the End of Days.

In addition to trees, plants also receive attention. R. Simon says that each plant has a guardian angel, who tells it to grow.

Inanimate matter also merits consideration. In Chapter Two a Rashi text was referred to which mentions that even stones should be treated with certain respect. This text’s origin is in the Aggadah literature: based on the Biblical verse that stones with no insight should not be disgraced [by exposing one’s nakedness to them], the Aggadah teaches that the case is that much stronger for not disgracing one’s human colleague, who was created in the Divine image.

Another modern motif which was discussed at length in the chapter on Halakha has an even broader application in the Aggadah: how one person’s actions may cause not only risk or nuisance to others, but even their destruction. The story goes that people are together
on a boat. One person starts to drill a hole in the floor of the boat under his seat. When the others protest he answers: “What do you care? I am only drilling under my place.” They answer: “The water will rise and flood us all.” 75

The above examples represent only a small number of the wealth of references in the Midrash literature to environmental issues. The writers identified underlying problems in the text they were commenting on, and the Midrash came to include explanations of these issues.

The fact that only modest attention has been given by modern Jewish writers to the environmental potential of the Midrash should not be considered an indication of its lack of importance. On the contrary: even from this limited selection it is evident that many questions of environmental interest existed more than a thousand years ago in the Jewish consciousness. Many of these motifs have re-emerged in somewhat different forms, and even more can be marshaled to confront a variety of the (often only partly) new questions raised by contemporary environmentalism.

Notes for Chapter Five

1 Bavli Sanhedrin 38a.
2 Ecclesiastes Rabba 7:13 (Wilna edition).
10 Bavli Ta’anit 19b–20a.
11 Bavli Hulin 7a.
13 Basing his interpretation on ancient sources, the late chief rabbi of England, Hertz, explains this Mishnah in line with this thought: “His saying states the duty of study of the Torah in extreme form. The Rabbis were certainly not indifferent to the beauty of Nature, as they prescribed various benedictions on beholding beautiful persons and
things... What is deprecated here is a willful distraction of the mind from Torah-meditation by the surrounding scenery... Actually he does not sin, as the exclamation, 'How fine is this tree', is itself an adoration of God. It is only because learning is so much more important, that the breaking off therefrom deserves condemnation." Rabbi Hertz, Machzor Vitry and Tifereth Yisroel, ibid.

17 Exodus Rabba 29:10 (Wilna ed.)
18 Isaiah 28:8.
19 Ezekiel 41:22.
20 Pirkei Avot 3:4. Hebrew. The translation used here is by Hertz, op. cit.
22 Bavli Shabbat 33a.
23 Bavli Eruvin 21b.
24 Bavli Yoma 75b.
25 Bavli Sukkah, 29a.
26 Ibid.
29 Bavli Bava Batra 158b.
30 Yehudah Halevi (about 1075–1141) takes a similar position, stating that the residents of the Land of Israel have an advantage over the inhabitants of the rest of the world, because only in Israel can Jews reach God. He also points out that all prophecy occurred in the Land of Israel or was concerned with it. Yehudah Halevi, the Kuzari 2:12–14. Dvir. 1972. Hebrew.
32 Bavli Makot 10a.
34 Bavli Kiddushin 49b.
35 Bavli Shabbat 155b and Rashi thereon.
36 From there on it has permeated the contemporary Israeli reality. As Mordechai Gafni points out, “All too often, in the public discourse of modern Israel, we hear of bus accidents in which children are killed being ascribed by religious figures to ‘divine punishment’: There are two common responses to the Holocaust, both of which assume the punishment thesis. The first response, given most powerful expression in the works of R. Yoel Teitelbaum, the late hasidic rebbe of Satmar, suggests that the Holocaust is punishment for the sin of Zionism. On the other end of the spectrum of belief is a book written in 1994 by a former Satmar hasid, R. Yisachar Teichtel, who suggests the opposite thesis: the Holocaust is punishment for European Jewry’s failure to respond to the divine clarion call of Zionism. European Jewry ignored God’s outstretched arm beckoning them to return to the land of Israel. The two positions, the anti-Zionist Satmar position and the pro-Zionist position of Em Habanim Smeiha – which, incidentally, is a standard text in religious Zionist schools – advance an identical argument concerning divine judgment. Both assume knowledge of God’s ways in the world. Both suggest that the
Holocaust is punishment for sin. They disagree only as to the nature of the sin. Mordechai Gafni, On the Commandment to Question. Azure, No. 1, Summer, 1996, p. 62.


40 Hertz on Ibid., 2:8.

41 Bavli Berakhot 17b.


43 Alcoholism is generally not considered an environmental issue but is relevant here in that it causes human health problems as a result of conspicuous consumption. The Babylonian Talmud mentions R. Hisda, who says: “God said to Noah: ‘Noah, you should have been warmed by what happened to Adam, the first man. His downfall was only caused by wine.’ This seems to indicate that the tree from which Adam had eaten was a grapevine, as has been taught: ‘The tree from which Adam, the first man, ate was, as R. Meir says, a grapevine, because there is nothing which brings to man so much suffering as wine.’ ”

44 Joseph Ibn Kaspi was born in l’Argentiere (in the Languedoc) around 1280, and died around 1340. He adds: “Why weary thyself to gain great riches, when neither thou nor any other could equal the vast store accumulated by the great mountain in our native city l’Argentiere, even though that mountain is a soul-less heap!” Quoted in: Israel Abrahams, Hebrew Ethical Wills. Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, Part 1, p. 145.

45 Died 1349.

46 Ibid., p. 171: “Why, forsooth, were ye brought into this world? Not to eat and drink and wear fine linen and embroideries, but for the service of the God who hangeth the earth over nothing. And since His wisdom has ordained that the body cannot be sustained without food and raiment, He permitted man to eat, drink and clothe himself for the sustenance of the body, that body and soul might be associated to perform God’s behests so long as their association continues. Food to a man is like oil to a lamp; if it have much it shines, if little it is quenched. Yet sooner is the lamp extinguished by redundancy than deficiency of oil.”

47 Bavli Shabbat 105b.

48 Bavli Sanhedrin 108b.

49 Exodus Rabba 2 (on verse 2:2). Hebrew.

50 Genesis Rabba 34:9 (on verse 8:20). Hebrew.

51 Pirke d’Rabbi Eliezer 23 (on Bereshit 8:20). Hebrew.

52 Psalms 145:9.

53 Bavli Bava Mezia 85a.

54 Bavli Sanhedrin 108a.

55 Bavli Berakhot 17a.


58 Bavli Sanhedrin 107b.

59 Bavli Eruvin 100b.

60 Leviticus Rabba 25:3 (on verse 19:23).

61 A collection of tannaic texts somewhat similar to the Mishnah.
63 Exodus 36:20: "They made the planks for the Tabernacle of acacia wood, upright."
64 Midrash Tanbuma, Parshat Vayakhel Section 9. (Warschau edition).
65 "He brings everything to pass precisely at its time; He also puts eternity in their mind,
but without man ever guessing, from first to last, all the things that God brings to pass." 
Ecclesiastes 3:11.
66 Yalkut Shimoni on Parshat Kedoshim, Section 615.
67 A similar Midrash appears in Midrash Tanbuma Parshat Kedoshim Section 8. (Warschau edition).
69 Bavli Ta’anit 23a.
72 Exodus 20:23. "Do not ascend My altar by steps, that your nakedness may not be
exposed upon it." and Rashi commentary on this text.
73 Mekhilta d’Rabbi Yishmael Parshat Yitro, Section 11. (Horowitz-Rabin edition).
74 The Midrash refers to a Bible text: "O God, Source of the breath of all flesh! When one
man sins, will You be wrathful with the whole community?" Numbers 16:22.
75 Leviticus Rabba 4:6.
Conclusions

This chapter summarizes the main characteristics of Jewish attitudes to modern environmentalism and environmental issues. The strategic approach followed permits viewing the current subject in an integrated way. Directions for future development in the field of Jewish environmental studies are also indicated.

The touching points between Judaism and the modern environmental sphere are multiple and relate to many areas. These include political and religious categories and, to a lesser extent, historical, sociological, cultural and literary ones. So far, Jewish writers have largely focused on a number of individual touching points.

This 'point-focused' rather than 'field-focused' approach of modern Jewish publications is one major reason for the limited understanding of Jewish-environmental interaction. There is also a lack of overall understanding of modern environmentalism by many Jewish writers, and the subject occupies a low priority on the Jewish agenda. Furthermore, modern Jewish publications often reflect an unbalanced view of classical Judaism's position on environmental issues.

The discipline of general environmental studies has grown rapidly during the past three decades, as a result of the major inroads modern environmentalism has made in Western society's awareness. Comprehensive Jewish environmental studies, however, have hardly begun to develop.

Many issues and motives are raised in the relatively few modern Jewish publications on the current subject. Their interrelation has usually been poorly understood due to the lack of an overall view of Judaism. This study aims at providing important elements for such a perspective.

The issues addressed

Within this context, three main issues will be addressed:
I. the views of classical Judaism on the relationship between God, man and the environment;
II. the Jewish outlook on modern environmentalism;
III. the potential for the further development of Jewish environmental studies.
I. Classical Judaism's Views on God, Man and the Environment

Judaism has developed over several millennia. Its classical literature, starting from the Bible and followed by Mishnah, Talmud and later rabbinical literature, expresses continuity in general and in environmental matters. In reading these texts through the eyes of the environmental discipline, it becomes clear that there was substantial environmental awareness – as we would now define it – in ancient Judaism. However, the attitudes to which Jewish sources refer must also be seen in the context of the time and society in which they were written. Classical Jewish literature originates in a much older society than does modern environmentalism; its world of thought reflects a different view of the meaning of human life.

Reference is made in classical Judaism to many environmental matters. Problems and thoughts on these already existed in Biblical Jewish society, but were not grouped within a specific subject frame. Integration of the classical references is required in order to develop a macro-view of Jewish attitudes toward environmental matters.

The key function of Halakha

Classical Jewish literature, including the Bible, deals primarily with the Jewish people, rather than with general humanity. Furthermore, different Jewish sources are far from equal in weight when determining Jewish attitudes toward any matters including environmental ones. Halakha is the main means for understanding the current subject. It dictates the observant Jew's normative behavior on all major matters affecting his life, including attitudes to many environmental issues. It provides substantially detailed guidelines as to how Jews must conduct themselves with regard to the ecosystem or the environment.

Many aspects of the relationship between Jews and the environment in pre-modern society have been ruled on by halakhic experts. Halakha does not allow the observant Jew freedom to act toward nature as he might perhaps wish. The multitude of rules in this area clearly indicate the place in Jewish Law of issues of environmental relevance, even if these regulations are not grouped in a 'Jewish environmental codex'.

Classical sources outside Halakha

The non-legal parts of the Bible illuminate the normative rules of the Halakha, and also provide further perspectives on other aspects of the current subject. The Bible does this primarily with respect to Jewish views on nature. It underlines repeatedly that nature is not self-standing but a manifestation of God's majesty, subordinated to
God’s will and serving a variety of Divine purposes. One of these purposes is as a tool of man’s reward or punishment.

The many environmentally-relevant references in rabbinical literature have been reviewed only in part. In these sources one finds many indications of Jewish views, expressed many centuries ago, on problems which have only recently become explicit within the modern environmental debate.

One such issue is the protection of biodiversity. The world of classical Jewish thought considers each animal and plant to have its particular function in Divine creation.

**Judaism’s theocentric character**

Non-halakhic Bible and Talmud texts, as well as other rabbinical literature, also express Jewish positions and value judgments on what are now seen as environmental issues. Reading all these sources together provides an overall picture of Jewish thought and prescribed behavior. It shows that Judaism does not take the matter of the environment lightly.

An integrated review of a cross-section of Halakha referring to the environment, together with an analysis of other Jewish sources, emphasizes the strong theocentric character of classical Judaism.

The classical sources stress that the Jew’s role is to recognize and serve God – creator of the world – in any variety of ways commanded by Him. These commandments should be applied to new situations by rabbinical scholars, following Divine principles.

Diverse attitudes exist in the Jewish tradition with regard to environmental issues and there are differences on these between various classical Jewish thinkers which have yet to be seriously assessed. However, these are secondary within the theocentric value system of Judaism.

**Jewish anthropocentrism is a misnomer**

Pluralism in contemporary Judaism sometimes resembles a cacophony. However, no Jewish writer has been identified who considers nature sacrosanct. Attitudes on many issues in classical Jewish sources are not homogeneous either, but a major core of environmental Halakha exists, which is not contested by any observant Jew. These laws refer to all areas of current environmental concern: natural resources, the relationship to nature, pollution and the allocation of space. There is also a substantial number of Halakhot referring to the relations between man and animals. On several more detailed issues there are significant differences between rabbinical positions concerning, *inter alia*, vegetarianism and the treatment of several elements of nature.
An integrated review of environmental halakhic rules clarifies that the discussion as to whether Judaism is anthropocentric or biocentric is misplaced. Judaism is theocentric, not anthropocentric; and no classical tradition even remotely affirms biocentrism.

The observant Jew is not free to eat all that is available, whenever it is available; even within marriage, he or she is not allowed to have sexual intercourse whenever they please. On one day of the week, the Shabbat, permitted activities and movements are limited. The same is true for the Holy Days. There is no full freedom to do with one's property as one wishes. There are halakhic prohibitions against the causing of pain to animals or random wanton destruction, both of nature and inanimate matter. Halakha is opposed to many elements of conspicuous consumption: its multiple rules set behavioral limits to such an attitude.

There are many other constraints besides these major ones. Such a value system contradicts anthropocentricity when the latter term is interpreted to indicate that humanity is free to do with the environment whatever it wants. Even those classical Jewish writers – e.g. Nachmanides – who indicate that the main purpose of Creation was for man, deny that man can do whatever he wants with nature.1 Certainly the Jew cannot.

That man must serve God does not mean that animals or nature are his equals. However insignificant both Jew and nature are compared to God, the former is permitted to supersede almost all Divine laws, including those regarding nature, in order to save his life.

With regard to their relationship with Jews, the Jewish tradition can be described in contemporary terminology as giving both animals and nature a variety of ‘rights’. From a Jewish viewpoint, this is better described by saying that the Jews are subject to restrictions in their relations to them, rather than using the expression ‘rights’.2

There has been little contemporary development of environmental Halakha. Further development in many directions can be initiated, for example, by individuals interested in environmental matters submitting queries to rabbinical authorities. On the basis of some precedents it can reasonably be assumed that they will receive rulings.

II. Judaism’s Attitudes Toward Modern Environmentalism

Does Judaism have anything to say to environmentalists? Put this way, the question is difficult to answer, and requires additional questions such as ‘which Judaism?’ and ‘explicitly or implicitly?’ Contemporary Judaism is so heterogeneous that the answer should be that certain Jews feel that they have something to say to environmentalists
in the name of Judaism, but these views are not shared by many other Jews. A summary of the views of Jews who have expressed themselves on this matter is found in Chapter Two.

Phrasing the question differently – for example, does classical Judaism or its continued contemporary expression, Orthodoxy, have anything to say to environmentalists? – the answer should not be directed specifically at environmentalists because it does not address any adherents of specific ‘isms’. Orthodox Judaism, however, does have something explicit to say to humanity on environmental matters, as it considers that mankind should respect the Noachide commandments, which include two relevant components with regard to nature. The first one is that there is only one God, Who should be revered; thus there is no place for the sanctification of nature or elements of it. God can make things sacred; He specifically did not make nature so. The second one is that animals should not be cruelly treated, enlarging on the ever min habai concept.

Orthodox Judaism may also have many implicit matters to say to environmentalists through the halakhic system, as well as through its world of thought. As environmentalism is such a fragmented movement, each person or group must determine whether this is a matter of interest. Should Orthodox Judaism see it as an important task to carry the implicit message to the nations of its own initiative? The answer seems to be ‘no’; it has different priorities on its agenda.

The analysis of Jewish attitudes toward modern environmentalism and environmental matters is important, however, for a variety of purposes. The first is that there is significant halakhic literature in what is nowadays a separate field; this Halakha should not be neglected. Furthermore, there are Jews interested in environmentalism, and any legitimate tool to keep individuals within the Jewish people should be explored. Also, as the Jewish people is part of society at large, for whom ‘the environment’ is a major concern, the Jewish community should participate in discussing and solving the problems, as long as this does not contradict Jewish values (for example, if one has to declare that nature is sacred).

It is in this light that the following should be read. After over 30 years in the modern mainstream, the environmental discourse, its underlying motives and perplexities are still not easily accessible. As society’s attitudes to environmental matters become more institutionalized, comprehension of the latter may become easier. Still, in the future an overall understanding of modern environmentalism will also remain a precondition for the identification and competent reading of classical Jewish sources relevant to environmental matters. (It
is to a large extent from these classical sources that Judaism’s attitude toward modern environmentalism must be derived.)

At the outset of this study, exploring Judaism’s view on modern environmentalism was based on reviewing modern publications. In the course of the study, a strategic view of Judaism on environmental matters has been developed from the reading of a cross-section of relevant classical Jewish sources.

As a result of this study, one can now also analyze modern environmentalism without the intermediation of reviewing modern Jewish publications. This includes issues such as attacks against Judaism, and the compatibility of Judaism and environmentalism. The overall view obtained also permits critical analysis of the ideas expressed by contemporary Jewish writers.

Some of these writers have viewpoints that diverge from classical Jewish positions. There is no Jewish basis for an ‘eco-kashrut’ approach, even if there is no objection to Jews’ applying life-cycle analysis in what they eat and consume.³

Different sets of values and origins

Judaism and modern environmentalism have different sets of values and origins. Their approaches to a variety of practical issues may sometimes coincide: both could broadly agree on avoiding wanton destruction and many other matters; Jewish animal welfare concepts are certainly closer to those of environmentalists than to those of the Spaniards cheering in stadiums when the bull is continuously tortured, then finally killed.

Buffalo Bill⁴ could never have been a Jewish folk hero the way he became an American one. The massive hunting of buffalo for railroad camps is not something which could rank high in the esteem of the Jewish tradition.

The Jewish approach that everything in creation has a function – which provides a compelling reason for maintaining biodiversity – leads to a conclusion which secular environmentalists should gladly go along with. However, the value systems behind the opinions held in common are quite different. Environmentalism and Judaism are not parallel in their main concerns; nor do they aim at similar goals. Even where the concepts of the two seem to coincide, analysis often shows that, not only do they draw from different points of view, but also from different value cultures.

No place for two central values

The more environmentalist currents have the character of a value system, seeing the protection of the ecosystem as the central task of
society, the more alien their world of thought is to Judaism, which sees recognition of God and obedience to Him as central. There is no place within Judaism for two different central values.

Deep ecologists are among those environmentalists who have gone farthest in developing a value system. Biocentrism is incompatible with traditional Judaism, which does not consider man and animal to be at the same level, however distant both may be from God.\(^5\)

Those environmentalists who see nature as sacrosanct are effectively expressing neo-paganism. This is diametrically opposed to the world of Jewish values, which has its origins in the affirmation of a single God and in the struggle against paganism and its idols.

This incompatibility has few practical consequences, however. The threats that deep ecology poses to Judaism are very limited. There are no countries with deep ecologist rulers, and its influence as a value system is limited.

**Reassessing White’s accusations**

Lynn White’s accusations with regard to the relation between environmental degradation and the Judeo-Christian tradition should be reassessed from an integrated Jewish perspective. He only referred in a very limited way to Judaism, as his article mainly dealt with Christianity’s responsibility for the environmental crisis.

His first observation concerning Judaism was: “Our daily habits of action, for example, are dominated by an implicit faith in perpetual progress which was unknown either to Greco-Roman antiquity or to the Orient. It is rooted in, and is indefensible apart from, Judeo-Christian teleology. The fact that Communists share it merely helps to show what can be demonstrated on many other grounds: that Marxism, like Islam, is a Judeo-Christian heresy.”\(^6\)

White’s remark with respect to Judaism was a superficial generalization. It is extremely doubtful that classical Judaism has an implicit faith in perpetual progress, even if it embraces the idea of a glorious end of the days when the Messiah will come. Few, if any, observant Jews would oppose the statement that their religion sees the patriarchs as better human beings than the greatest contemporary Jewish sages. Ancient Jewish sources state that the generations decline the further away they are from the giving of the Torah on Sinai. The Talmud says: “The fingernail of the early teachers is superior to the waist of the later ones.”\(^7\)\(^8\)

The rabbis in the Talmud could not make a halakhic statement if it contradicted the opinion of a mishnaic authority, who lived hun-
dreds of years earlier, unless they based their statement on another mishnaic authority. This reflects a state of mind which is the opposite of what ‘faith in perpetual progress’ means.

Furthermore, White did not develop his thesis on Jewish legitimization of the spoliation of nature by reviewing the multiple references to environmental issues in the Halakha, or even in the Bible and its commentators. He quoted a single Bible text – Genesis 1:28 – without reference to other texts or traditional Jewish sources. His implicit, broad accusation of Judaism, mentioned in passing while he dealt with Christianity, was thus based on an exceedingly limited view of Judaism.

White then continued: “Christianity inherited from Judaism not only a concept of time as nonrepetitive and linear but also a striking story of creation. By gradual stages a loving and all-powerful God had created light and darkness, the heavenly bodies, the earth and all its plants, animals, birds, and fishes. Finally, God had created Adam and, as an afterthought, Eve, to keep man from being lonely. Man named all the animals, thus establishing his dominance over them. God planned all of this explicitly for man’s benefit and rule: no item in the physical creation had any purpose save to serve man’s purposes.”

Here White was wrong again. In Judaism’s world of thought, Creation serves God’s plans first and foremost. Many things are there to teach man a lesson, rather than serve his purposes as he sees them. Unless otherwise proven, one has to assume that White was ignorant about essential elements of classical Judaism.

**Concrete fields of conflict**

Judaism has few problems with modern environmentalism with respect to many practical issues. Health protection, pollution control, sustainable cities and animal welfare all have their place in Judaism. There is often a difference between the two, however, as to which basic concept they represent and consequently where the emphasis should be laid.

Neither is the fact that classical Judaism and environmentalism seem to reach similar practical conclusions on several major environmental issues a random result. Both are concerned about the environment as a major problem area confronting civil society. In the case of Judaism, the search for solutions has been carried out in a theocentric civil society.

As mentioned before, Jewish civil society (however vague a concept that may seem today) has its underpinnings in Halakha. This is rather a different concept from that of modern environmentalist
civil society (however undefined) which is based on a variety of opinions and beliefs, many of which are secular in nature.

There are some practical conflicts between Judaism and some environmentalist currents – such as animal protection movements in particular – with regard to religious slaughter. These tensions existed well before modern environmentalism became a mainstream movement. As environmentalism deals with so many issues and its values are so different from Judaism, future tensions may develop on other issues.

III. Jewish Environmental Studies

The strategic perspective thus acquired also enables conclusions to be made in the field of scholarship. There are so many categories – with so many elements – of Jewish-environment interaction that there is a space for a new, distinct field of Jewish environmental studies. A comprehensive view within the framework of a single field is also necessary in order to deepen understanding of Jewish attitudes toward the environment. It is mainly by seeing the various Jewish environmental issues as part of a whole that significant scholarly progress can be made.

There is a considerable body of classical Jewish literature, comprising texts of very diverse natures. By reviewing this corpus systematically, a more detailed picture of Judaism’s attitude toward the environment can be obtained. This will require much additional study by scholars familiar with both Judaism and environmentalism.

Issues to be studied include detailed assessments of environmental Biblical and rabbinical halakhic texts, other Biblical texts and the Aggadah. Attitudes of various Bible commentators and rabbinical attitudes toward environmental issues over the centuries should also be compared. The same goes for Jewish mystical literature.

A further tool for gaining insight into Jewish attitudes toward the environment is the gradual development of hierarchical mapping of environmental Halakhot and other expressions of value judgments in classical Jewish sources. Responsa in the environmental field to be issued in the future by halakhic authorities are likely to provide further stimuli for research in this field.

The behavior toward the environment of Jewish communities in the Land of Israel and the Diaspora throughout history has hardly been touched upon. Israel’s and Zionism’s attitudes toward the environment and their motives merit much more study than has been carried out so far. This should be done within the framework of a
much broader assessment of the political and behavioral relation of the Jewish people to environmental issues and environmentalism. Another requirement is a deeper understanding of what causes the discrepancy between the many references in classical Judaism to environmental issues and the lack of interest of large parts of the Orthodox community in environmental aspects of life.

Thus it is in the field of scholarship that the major environmental challenge to Judaism lies. As mentioned, however, political and behavioral aspects should also be given attention.

Notes for Conclusions

1. Humanity’s God-given role toward nature is defined in much less detail in classical Jewish sources than normative Jewish behavior toward it.

2. Bleich points out that “in Jewish law no less than in other systems of law, neither the animal nor its guardian is granted persona standi in judicio, i.e., the animal lacks capacity to institute judicial proceedings to prevent others from engaging in acts of cruelty of which it may be the victim. This is so despite the unique provision in Jewish law to the effect that an animal that has committed an act of manslaughter is subject to criminal penalty but is entitled to due process of law, including a right analogous to the Sixth Amendment right of confrontation, viz., the requirement that the proceedings take place only in the presence of the accused animal.” J. David Bleich, Contemporary Halakhic Problems. New York: Ktav, 1989, Vol. 3, pp. 203–4. For Helfand, however, rights do exist; see Ecology and the Jewish Tradition: A Postscript. Judaism, Vol. 20 No. 3, Summer, 1971, pp. 330–335.

3. Neither is there a basis in classical Judaism for Troster’s biocentric compromises nor for Wyschogrod’s reflections that Jewish prophets should have listened more to what those of the Baal had to say. Classical Jewish sources say very clearly why they should not have listened.


5. Biocentrists certainly cannot recognize themselves to any extent in the words of Joseph B. Soloveitchik: “When man, the crowning glory of the cosmos, approaches the world, he finds his task at hand – the task of creation. He must stand on guard over the pure, clear existence, repair the defects in the cosmos, and replenish the ‘privation’ in being. Man, the creature, is commanded to become a partner with the Creator in the renewal of the cosmos; complete and ultimate creation – this is the deepest desire of the Jewish people.” Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, Halakhic Man. Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1983, p. 105.


7. Bavli Yoma 9b, where the matter of the relative importance of the earlier versus the later generations is also discussed in further detail.

8. This is expressed, inter alia, in several other Talmud texts. Rabba son of Bar Hana, says “... The early generations are not like the later generations. The early generations turned the Torah in to their main occupation and their work into an auxiliary one. Thus
they were successful in both. The later generations turned their work into their main occupation and the Torah into an auxiliary one. Thus they failed in both.” Bavli *Brakhot* 35b. The decline of the generations is also emphasized by the sage Zeira’s saying: “If the first were sons of angels, we are mortal people. And if the first were mortal people, we are like asses.” To make it perfectly clear, he adds that he does not refer to the asses of two important scholars, which showed understanding, but “to the rest of the asses”. Bavli *Shabbat* 112b.

9 The fact that binding Halakha is decided by contemporary rabbis does not change this, as they must base their decisions on their predecessors’ rulings.


11 Ibid., p. 20.
Glossary

Aggadah – classical rabbinical texts which are non-legal in character
Asherah – a sacred tree (pole) dedicated to idolatry
Ashkenazi – the culture and liturgical rites of Jews who originated mainly in Germany and Eastern Europe
Bal tashhit – the Biblical commandment forbidding wanton destruction
Baraita – text originating in the Mishnah period, but not included in the Mishnah
Barcula – a prayer in the Jewish morning and evening services
Bar Mitzvah – the Jewish legal maturity of a boy at the age of 13
Bavli – the Babylonian Talmud, the edited discussions by the Babylonian sages on the Mishnah (from about 220-500)
Beit haMidrash – house of learning
Conservative Judaism – mid-19th century movement in Europe and USA, maintaining Hebrew as the liturgical language, kashrut, and Shabbat observance, but reluctantly accepting some other modern changes
Dat haAvoda – the religion of labor
Derekh Eretz – decency and decorum
Gemara – part of the Talmud; text which interprets the Mishnah
Halakha – the corpus of Jewish laws which regulate the life of the observant Jew
Halakhot – Jewish laws
Hamez – leavened bread, forbidden during the festival of Pesach
Hasidism – a movement founded in Poland around 1730 by Israel Ba’al Shem-Tov. Its adherents (hasidim) focused on discovering the true service of God through religious enthusiasm.
Havurah – community
Heder – Jewish elementary school
Hora’at Sha’ab – the temporary suspension of the Jewish law for emergency purposes
Hoshana Rabbah – the last day of the Sukkot festival
Hukkim – a category of God-given law which was unlikely to have been developed by the community for rational reasons
Kabbalah – Jewish mysticism
Kabbalist – a person who believes in and studies the Kabbalah
Kashrut – Jewish dietary laws
Kav – a measure equal to 24 eggs
Kevod haBeriyot – respect for the dead
Kibbutz – a collective settlement in Israel
Kiddush – ritual blessing over wine on Shabbat and holidays
Kilayim – the forbidden mixing of certain species
Korban – sacrifice
Manna – a non-meat food, provided by God in the Israelites’ 40 years of wandering in the desert
Midrash – a method of rabbinic explanation of Bible texts, also used for a collection of such interpretations
Minhagim – religious customs
Mishnah – the collection of oral teachings, edited by R. Yehuda the Prince, around the year 200
Mishne Torah (the repetition of the Torah) – codex summarizing the entire Jewish Law up to the 12th century, by Maimonides
Mishpatim – a category of God-given law which, for its benefit, civil society would have instituted on a rational basis even if they were not of Divine origin
Mitnaggedim – ‘opponents’; a movement which opposes Hasidism
Mitzvah (mitzvot) – religious commandment(s)
Nazirite – a person who vows to consecrate himself to God for a certain period of time
Noachide laws – laws in the Torah valid for all humanity. These prohibit idolatry, the vain use of God’s name, murder, sexual transgressions, theft and eating the flesh of live animals
Pesach – the holiday of ‘Passover’, celebrating the Israelites’ exodus from slavery in Egypt
Peshat – the plain meaning of a text
Piki’ah Nefesh (literally: watching one’s soul) – the rule that one should transgress the observance of Halakhot rather than die (the only exceptions to this being murder, incest and idolatry)
Pirkei Avot – a tractate from the Mishnah which contains ethical teachings
Reconstructionism – a Jewish religious movement, mainly active in the United States, where it was founded by Mordecai M. Kaplan in 1922. It sees the survival of the Jewish people as a central value, rather than religious beliefs or rituals. As far as the latter is concerned, each individual should consider which ones he wishes to practice. It does not believe that the Torah is Divine revelation to Moses.
Reform Judaism – also known as ‘Liberal’ or ‘Progressive’ Judaism; originated in Germany in the 19th century; varies from place to place, but the communities share the assertion of the legitimacy
of change in Judaism, and the denial of eternal validity to any
given formulation of Jewish belief or codification of Jewish law
**Responsum (Responsa)** – Jews who required halakhic decisions re-
ferred their questions to Jewish scholars. Their answers, known
as the Responsa literature, extend Jewish law further
**Rosh haShanah** – the Jewish New Year, which occurs in the autumn
**Sefer haHinukh** – an explanation of the Biblical commandments,
written by Rabbi Aaron Halevi of Barcelona around 1300
**Sephardi** – the culture and liturgical rites of Eastern or Oriental
Jews
**Shabbat** – the seventh day of the week; the Sabbath
**Shehitah** – Jewish ritual slaughter
**Shema** – central prayer of both the morning and evening services
**Shemittah** – the commandment to let the fields rest for a year, and
not to use any products that they may produce during that time
**Shilhu'ah haKen** – the commandment to send away a mother bird
who is sitting on fledglings or eggs, before taking them
**Shomrei Adamah** (literally: Guards of the Earth) – a Jewish environ-
mental group in the United States
**Shulhan Arukh** (the set table) – codex of Halakha compiled by
Rabbi Yosef Karo (16th century) in Palestine
**Sifrei** – one of the oldest collections of rabbinical traditions
**Sukkah** – a hut in which one lives or eats temporarily during the
festival of Sukkot
**Sukkot** – the seven-day Feast of Tabernacles which falls in September
or October
**Takkanah (takkanot)** (literally: enactment) – decisions taken by rab-
binical authorities in the public interest
**Talmud** – a book which contains the oral law in writing, and the
rabbinic discussion of its interpretation. It consists of Mishnah
and Gemara. There are two versions of the Talmud: the Babyl-
onian (Bavli) and the Jerusalemite (Yerushalmi) or Palestinian
**Tashlikh** – a ceremony taking place on the afternoon of the first day
of Rosh haShanah in which one’s sins are symbolically cast into
a body of running water
**Torah** – the Pentateuch, the Five Books of Moses
**Tu bi-Shevat** – a one-day minor festival, the new year of the trees,
usually falling in January or February
**Yishuv ha-Aretz, Yishuv ha-Olam** – settling the land or earth
**Yom Kippur** – the Day of Atonement, a solemn day of prayer and
fasting, which falls in September or October
**Yom tov** – a festival or holy day
**Yovel** – jubilee, every 50th year
Za'ar Ba'alei Hayyim – the commandment to avoid unnecessary suffering to animals
Zaddik – a righteous person; in the Hasidic movement the zaddik is a spiritual and moral leader
Zohar – the Book of Splendor; the central work of Jewish mysticism, usually attributed to the sage Shimon bar Yochai but supposed to have been written by Moses de Leon in Spain at the end of the 13th century
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Mantres Osterfeld lives in Jerusalem. An international consultant, he specializes in business and environmental strategy. He is a former director of a consultancy whose client list includes four of the world’s largest banks, and has been an advisor to governments and the boards of some of the world’s leading multinational corporations in 20 countries over 63 years. He has been on several boards, including one of Israel’s largest investment companies, and has been involved in Jewish public affairs for four decades. His books have been published in several languages. He co-authored the bestselling *Battle for Palermo* (Revolution in Italy) with Lorenzo Nacci. His other books are *Eisenment and Conflict: Israel’s New Future*—Interviews, and *Le Stato Crea Avvente* (The State as a Business—Do-It-Yourself Political Forecasting).


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Manfred Gerstenfeld lives in Jerusalem. An international consultant, he specializes in business and environmental strategy. He is a former director in a consultancy whose other shareholders included four of the world’s largest banks, and has been an advisor to governments and the boards of some of the world’s leading multinational corporations in 20 countries over 35 years. He has been on several boards, including one of Israel’s largest investment companies, and has been involved in Jewish public affairs for four decades. His books have been published in several languages. He co-authored the bestselling Rivalutare l’Italia (Revaluing Italy) with Lorenzo Necci. His other books are Environment and Confusion; Israel’s New Future—Interviews; and Lo Stato Come Azienda (The State as a Business-Do-it-Yourself Political Forecasting).
Manfred Gerstenfeld provides a much-needed overview of Judaism's interactions with environmentalism and the environment. Here he analyzes a multitude of references in the Bible, Talmud and later writings to environmental issues which, today, are grouped together in a problem complex that has become one of society's major pre-occupations. The author demonstrates that Jewish law, the Biblical narrative and the Midrash literature reflect a coherent approach. He introduces new analytical tools which help the reader to understand Judaism's stance.

This lucid text provides a balanced assessment of a wide range of ancient and modern sources which are not accessible together elsewhere. It makes a compelling case for a new academic field: Jewish environmental studies. Both professional and lay readers will be greatly helped by this well-informed and insightful book.

Professor A. Friedman
Head, The Jerusalem Institute for Israel Studies

As far as I know, there is no equivalent available as to the number and scope of Jewish sources covered and the number of environmental issues dealt with. The strategic perspective developed by Gerstenfeld will, in all probability, have a major impact on future studies of the interaction between Judaism, environmentalism and the environment.

Professor Lucas Reijnders
Environmental Studies, University of Amsterdam

As few people are familiar with both classical Jewish sources and the environmental discourse, it is very important for such a survey to be easily accessible. The author's earlier work "Environment and Confusion" already shows that he is qualified to address a wide audience with respect to the environment. This new manuscript is well written and erudite without being cumbersome, for all that it refers to many different areas of study. It displays clear, coherent and well-ordered reasoning.

Joseph Agassi
Professor Emeritus, Department of Philosophy
Tel-Aviv University and York University, Toronto

Manfred Gerstenfeld's book on Judaism and the Environment draws on the great wealth of Jewish insight on the spectrum of issues on this subject, addressing some of the most pressing challenges that contemporary society faces. As a result, the reader is both edified by the wisdom of Jewish tradition and gains a deeper understanding of how these modern challenges may be effectively addressed.

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[Summary in Dutch]

Jodendom, Milieubewegingen en het Milieu

In kaart gebracht en geanalyseerd

De centrale vraag in dit proefschrift is: “Hoe ziet het Jodendom de moderne milieubewegingen en milieuaangelegenheden?”


‘Milieuaangelegenheden’, zoals hier gedefinieerd, bestrijken verschillende gebieden. De belangrijkste hiervan zijn de verhouding van de mens tot de levende natuur, zijn (of haar) houding en gedrag jegens de dierenwereld, het gebruik van natuurlijke hulpbronnen, de invloed van vervuiling en overlast op derden, alsmede aspecten van ruimtelijke ordening.

Onder de ‘Moderne milieubewegingen’ worden verstaan die stromingen en enkelingen die de bescherming van het ecosysteem als een centraal maatschappelijk doel beschouwen. De opvattingen van de betrokkenen worden hier modern milieudenken genoemd.

Beduidende publieke bezorgdheid over het milieu ontwikkelde zich pas in de tweede helft van de twintigste eeuw. De oorsprong van het moderne milieudenken ligt echter al in de vorige eeuw.

Verscheidene onderwerpen, die nu als milieuaangelegenheden worden beschouwd, hebben vele eeuwen geleden reeds belangstelling gevonden in het Joodse denken en handelen. Bijbel, Talmud, responsa literatuur en andere klassieke Joodse bronnen bevatten een groot aantal aanknopingspunten op dit gebied.

Iedere poging om tot een geconsolideerd Joods standpunt te komen ten opzichte van de natuur, het milieu in het algemeen, of het moderne milieudenken moet beginnen met een overzicht van de klassieke Joodse bronnen. Deze vormen het belangrijkste onderwerp van dit proefschrift.

Hoofdstuk een behandelt de raakpunten tussen Jodendom en modern milieudenken.

Verscheidene aspecten van het moderne milieudenken wekken interesse en/of bezorgdheid bij eigentijdse Joodse schrijvers. Om dit beter te begrijpen, wordt enige aandacht gegeven aan de historische ontwikkeling en de belangrijkste karakteristieken daarvan.

Het moderne milieudenken is moeilijk te definiëren omdat het gevarieerd en versplinterd is. Voor sommigen is het een universalistische ideologie die betrekking heeft op de verhouding tussen mens en natuur. Anderen beschrijven het als waardesysteem of wetenschappelijk gefundeerde filosofie. Een minder vergaande definitie ziet het als een verzameling van uiteenlopende overtuigingen en/of opinies, die milieuaangelegenheden centraal stellen. Voor anderen is het milieudenken een praktische benadering ter bescherming van de gezondheid, het beheersen van de vervuilingsproblematiek en de eliminatie van milieuveranderingen die mens of levende natuur bedreigen. Het is niet makkelijk om een evenwichtig oordeel te ontwikkelen met betrekking tot de vele aspecten van het milieudenken. Ook het bepalen van een algemeen Joods standpunt met betrekking tot dit veelzijdige onderwerp is moeilijk. Dit compliceert de discussie tussen beide denksferen.


Interacties en raakpunten tussen Jodendom en modern milieudenken, vaak nog in statu nascendi, zijn verspreid over een groot, onsamenhangend en grotendeels nog niet in kaart gebracht gebied. Dit proefschrift behandelt vooral onderwerpen die meer betrekking hebben op het religieuze karakter dan op de sociologische, culturele of politieke aspecten van het Joodse standpunt met betrekking tot het milieuvaagstuk. Evenmin wordt de houding ten opzichte van het milieu van Israel – de dominerende eigentijdse expressie van het Joodse volk – in detail geanalyseerd. Dit hoofdstuk bevat ook enkele, in milieupozicht relevante, observaties over onderwerpen zoals de nabijbelse geschiedenis, het Zionisme, de kibbutzbeweging,
Israëlische en diasporahoudingen alsmede organisaties van joodse milieuaanvinders. Een ander raakvlak tussen jodendom en milieu- 
denken betreft de milieuaanvinders in het werk van moderne Israëlische en joodse schrijvers. Al deze gebieden eisen veel meer onderzoek dan binnen het kader van dit proefschrift mogelijk was.

Hoofdstuk twee analyseert de joodse reactie op het milieudenken. Het Jodendom werd oorspronkelijk betrokken in de milieudiscussie vanwege een debat aan het eind van de jaren zestig en het begin van de jaren zeventig. Toen stelden enkele, voornamelijk Amerikaanse, publicaties dat Joden- en Christendom de ideologische basis gelegd hadden voor de huidige milieucrisis. Deze beschuldigingen hielden in dat met name een passage in Genesis de uitbuiting van de natuur door de mens voor zijn doeleinden legitimeerde. Vooral belangrijk was een, uit 1967 daterend, veelgeciteerd artikel met deze strekking van de Amerikaanse historicus Lynn White Jr.

In het overigens grotendeels ongestructureerde debat over de houding van het Jodendom ten opzichte van het milieu, snijden joodse auteurs veel thema's aan. Zij hebben weinig gemeen behalve het feit dat zij gemotiveerd zijn om over dit onderwerp te schrijven en de overtuiging hebben, om zeer verschillende redenen, dat de milieudiscussie belangrijk is.

Slechts weinig Joodse auteurs, die terzake hebben gepubliceerd, zetten hun motieven uiteen. Het spectrum van standpunten reikt van aanhangers van catastrofetheorieën tot 'contrarians', die menen dat het milieuvraagstuk niet bestaat dan wel niet problematisch is. Sommige publicaties verwijzen naar milieubewustzijn in het Jodendom en onderstrepen de harmonie tussen Jodendom en milieudenken. Anderen zien grote spanningen tussen beiden.

De vermelde spanningen komen ten dele voort uit neopaganistische elementen in het milieudenken. Andere waargenomen spanningen zijn te herleiden tot overeenkomsten tussen standpunten van sommige milieuaanvinders en de dieren- en natuurliefde van de nazis gecombineerd met de nazihat jegens bepaalde mensen. De nogal sterke positie van de Groene politieke partij in Duitsland en de anti-Israël houding van een aantal Europese Groene politici heeft bij sommigen in Joodse kring bezorgdheid gewekt.

De belangstelling van de meeste Joodse auteurs die over milieudo- 
derwerpen schrijven ligt niet primair bij milieuvraagstukken. Hun pu- 
liecaties op milieugebied hebben een incidenteel karakter. De meesten hebben geen grondige kennis van het milieudenken. Dit leidt tot een beperkt begrip van de onderwerpen die ter discussie staan.

In het geringe aantal publicaties over Jodendom en milieu komen vele thema's ter sprake. Ook hebben ze een zeer uiteenlopende
Joodse achtergrond: van orthodoxie tot reconstructionisme. Het spectrum van opinies ten opzichte van de natuur en de vernietiging daarvan is zeer breed. Wel zijn er bepaalde grenzen die niet overschreden worden. Biocentrisme lijkt zo onverdedigbaar dat slechts weinig Joodse auteurs zich ermee bezighouden laat staan dat ze zich ermee identificeren. Zowel het heiligverklaren van de natuur als zo weinig om de natuur geven dat men deze zonder reden vernietigt zijn standpunten die beide als volkomen onaanvaardbaar worden beschouwd.

Het derde hoofdstuk behandelt milieurelevante thema's in de Halacha.

De Halacha schrijft Joden leefregels op vele gebieden voor. Het analyseren van dit grote systeem van leefregels geeft indicaties van klassieke Joodse houdingen op een aantal gebieden die met het milieu samenhangen. Deze kunnen in verschillende categorieën en onderwerpen onderverdeeld worden:

a) Regels met betrekking tot het verbod van moedwillige vernietiging.

b) Voorschriften op het wijde gebied van gezondheidsbescherming en beperking van overlast. Zowel de Bijbel als de Talmud bevatten vele voorbeelden van het voorkomen en verminderen van vervuiling en hinder teneinde overlast voor derden te beperken.

c) Wetten met betrekking tot grondpolitiek en bodembescherming. Daartoe behoren ook de geboden met betrekking tot het Shabbatjaar en het Jubeljaar.

d) Voorschriften die betrekking op dierenbescherming hebben.

e) Wetten die de bestendigheid van de soorten betreffen.

f) Wetten met betrekking tot onderdelen van de ruimtelijke ordening van de steden der Levieten en de vrijsteden. Deze zijn in zekere zin voorlopers van het moderne concept van de duurzame stad.

g) De Shabbatwetten bevatten verscheidene milieurelevante elementen.

h) Andere regels met milieurelevante zoals de spijswetten (kashrut) en het vasten.

i) Halacha die betrekking heeft op het conflict tussen milieu- en economische belangen.

Vele regels gelden voor Joden overal ter wereld. Andere gelden uitsluitend in het land Israel. Uit bovenstaande opsomming wordt duidelijk dat wat nu ‘Joodse milieuwetgeving’ genoemd kan worden
al vele eeuwen bestaat, zij het niet samengevat in een aparte codex. Deze betreft belangrijke milieuaaspecten van de industriële en consumptiemaatschappij.


Slechts zelden wordt de gedachte geuit dat het halachische systeem verder ontwikkeld kan worden teneinde zich met meer milieuproblemen bezig te houden. De Joodse traditie verschafte vele mogelijkheden hiertoe. De toepassing van Halacha op problematische gebieden waar zowel waardoordelen als praktische kwesties relevant zijn kan uitgroeien tot de belangrijkste bijdrage van het Jodendom op dit gebied.

Het mechanisme om dit proces op gang te brengen hoeft niet ingewikkeld te zijn. Indien in de toekomst sommige halachische experts belangstelling krijgen voor de milieuwetgeving en een gespecialiseerde kennis hiervan verwerven kunnen zij responsa schrijven. Een andere mogelijkheid is dat bezorgde enkelingen halachische vragen op milieugebied stellen aan rabbinale experts die bereid zijn deze te bestuderen en te beantwoorden.

In conflicten tussen verschillende belangen beslist de Halacha wat het zwaarst moet wegen. Zulke rangordes worden ook duidelijk in de waardoordelen die afgeleid kunnen worden uit de verhalende, profetische en wijsheidsteksten van de Bijbel en de latere literatuur zoals de Agadah. Door dergelijke rangordes in de klassieke Joodse bronnen te bestuderen kan een beter begrip van de Joodse visie op het milieu verkregen worden. Zo kan men bijvoorbeeld de plaats zien van onderdelen van het ecosysteem in de Joodse waardenscala. Een bijdrage tot het in kaart brengen van de hierarchie van waarden is in dit hoofdstuk te vinden.

Hoofdstuk vier behandelt Joodse standpunten aangaande milieu-vraagstukken zoals die vooral in het verhalende gedeelte van de Bijbel tot uiting komen.

Deze teksten verruimen het inzicht in de Joodse houding met betrekking tot milieu-vraagstukken. In de verhalende, profetische en wijsheidsteksten vindt men een beduidend aantal hiervoor relevante thema’s. Eigentijdse Joodse publicaties besteden hier weinig aandacht aan. Terwijl de meeste halachische Torateksten met milieuaaspecten zo langzamerhand geïdentificeerd zijn, is dit niet het geval met andere Bijbelpassages.
Vier verschillende benaderingen worden geopperd die gezamenlijk milieurelevante inzichten kunnen verschaffen met betrekking tot het verhalende gedeelte van de Bijbel.


Sommige Bijbelverhalen – zoals die over de mens in het paradijs en de zondvloed – kunnen, deze methodiekwel, vrijwel als milieuparadigma gelezen worden. Andere zoals het verhaal van de tien plagen in Egypte hebben vele milieurelevante aspecten.

Een verdere verheldering van het standpunt van het klassieke Jodendom ten opzichte van het milieu kan worden verkregen door Bijbelse teksten uit het orthodoxe gebedenboek te bestuderen. De rabbijnen die de gebeden samenstelden in de nabijbelse tijd legden de nadruk op concepten die zij belangrijk vonden. De milieurelevante teksten in kwestie hebben vooral betrekking op de natuur.

Een andere methode is de analyse van hoe moderne Joodse publicaties milieurelevante Bijbelteksten interpreteren. Verder inzicht kan verkregen worden uit de klassieke Joodse commentaren op Bijbelteksten. Dit is bijvoorbeeld het geval met verhalen zoals die over de zondvloed en de tien plagen.

De houding ten aanzien van het milieu zoals die in het Bijbelse verhaal tot uitdrukking komt wordt in hoofdstuk vier geanalyseerd aan de hand van een aantal onderwerpen:

a) Het paradijsverhaal.
b) Natuur en verhalen die betrekking hebben op natuurlijke hulpbronnen.
c) De plaats van dieren in de Bijbelse verhalen en
d) vervuiling.

Vanuit het Joodse gezichtspunt en vanuit het moderne milieu Denken was het paradijs een ideaal oord. In de messiaanse gedachte streeft het Jodendom naar een soortgelijke goede situatie aan het einde der tijden. Het milieudenken streeft naar duurzaamheid. De idealen van deze twee radicaal verschillende denksferen hebben veel gemeen ondanks de grote verschillen in benadering, waarden en
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motieven. Milieuvraagstukken en religieuze gezichtspunten kunnen ook in andere gevallen met elkaar geconfronteerd worden. Dit verheldert het verschil in benadering van deze twee denksferen.

Een ander belangrijk onderwerp in de Bijbel is de rol van de natuur. Twee centrale visies met betrekking tot de natuur als God's schepping komen tot uiting. De eerste is dat de natuur een manifestatie is van God's majesteit. De mens moet dit erkennen. De tweede is dat God de natuur geschapen heeft. Dus mag Hij haar vrijelijk gebruiken en veranderen. Dit betekent bijvoorbeeld, dat God dode materie in levende kan omzetten of levende natuur kan vernietigen. Het normaal functioneren van de natuur wordt expliciet afhankelijk gemaakt van het vervullen van God's geboden.

De Bijbel bevat veel voorbeelden van de verandering van de natuur – in meer conventionele terminologie wonderen genoemd – als instrument ter bestraffing van gemeenschappen en enkelingen. Het meest extreme voorbeeld hiervan is de zondvloed waardoor – met uitzondering van Noach's familie – de gehele mensheid en een groot gedeelte van het ecosysteem vernietigd werden. Een ander voorbeeld is de vernietiging van Sodom omdat daar geen tien rechtvaardigen gevonden werden. Zo ook het verhaal van Lot's vrouw die in een zoutpilaar veranderde omdat zij, de ramp ontlopend, omkijkt en daarmee de enige specifieke Goddelijke instructie overtreedt.

Het belangrijkste voorbeeld van een reeks veranderingen van de natuur als instrument van Goddelijke straf is het verhaal van de tien plagen die de Egyptenaren treffen. Weinig andere Bijbelteksten beschrijven in een dergelijk detail de betrekkingen tussen God, mens en natuur in het Jodendom. De mensheid moet God gehoorzamen; indien zij dat niet doet, kan de natuur op uitzonderlijke manieren benut worden om haar te bestraffen.

De Bijbel brengt ook een aantal gezichtspunten naar voren ten aanzien van natuurlijke hulpbronnen:

a) Zij zijn in God's hand.
b) Wie ontevreden is met door God gegeven natuurlijke hulpbronnen riskeert Zijn toorn.
c) Soms zijn zij schaars en worden ze tot twistappel.
d) Natuurlijke hulpbronnen moeten verstandig worden benut.

De Bijbel verschaf tot visies op dieren en hun plaats in de gemeenschap. Deze kunnen als volgt worden samengevat:

a) Dieroffers zijn een substituut voor mensenoffers.
b) Dieren kunnen een instrument zijn van God's straf.
Het lezen van de Bijbel vanuit een moderne milieuvisie vestigt ook de aandacht op vele andere thema’s, zoals vervuiling, recycling en de wijze waarop milieuproblemen de economie beïnvloeden. Hoofdstuk vijf behandelt een aantal milieurelevante thema’s in de agadische literatuur.

Deze literatuur biedt een grote verscheidenheid van milieuonderwerpen. Dit gebied vereist veel meer onderzoek dan binnen het kader van dit proefschrift mogelijk was. De voorbeelden in dit hoofdstuk zijn indicatief voor de potentieel rijkdom aan milieumaateriaal in de Agadah.


Een breed spectrum van milieurelevante thema’s wordt besproken. Een deel daarvan betreft de relaties tussen abstracte concepten zoals heiligheid en rechtvaardigheid aan de ene kant en concrete zaken zoals verval, bederf, vernietiging, ziekte, dood en natuur rampen aan de andere.

Andere passages uit de Agadah demonstreren een langdurige Joodse belangstelling voor onderdelen van wat nu het milieuvraagstuk genoemd wordt. Dit betreft kwesties zoals stilte en lawaai, het voorkomen van overdadige consumptie, het beschermen van de biodiversiteit, medelijden met dieren, het belang van het planten van bomen en gelijkheid tussen de generaties.

Conclusies

De combinatie van de verschillende soorten klassieke Joodse bronnen, die op milieu zaken betrekking hebben, maakt de coher entie duidelijk tussen voorgeschreven gedrag en gedachtenwereld.

Een meer geïntegreerd overzicht van de milieuregels in de Halacha verduidelijkt hoezeer de discussie over het anthropo- of biocentrisch karakter van het Jodendom misplaatst is. Het is immers theocentrisch.

Veel, de Jood opgelegde, beperkingen zouden wij nu milieurelevant noemen. De orthodoxe Jood mag niet alles eten en sommige soorten


De orthodoxie richt zich in de eerste plaats tot Joden. Zij heeft echter ook de gehele mensheid iets expliciet te zeggen; iedereen moet de Noachidische geboden in acht nemen. Twee hiervan hebben milieubespecten. Er is een God, die vereerd moet worden. Heiliging van de natuur of onderdelen daarvan is derhalve misplaatst. God kan bepaalde dingen heilig maken. Dat heeft hij wat betreft de natuur niet gedaan. Een ander, voor allen geldig, Noachidisch gebod is dat dieren niet wreed behandeld mogen worden.

Halacha en orthodoxe gedachtenwereld hebben daarnaast ook impliciet potentiële betekenis voor de milieubewegingen. Daar deze echter zeer versplinterd zijn moet ieder individu of groep voor zich bepalen wat van belang is. Is het de taak van het orthodoxe Jodendom om, op eigen initiatief, deze boodschap duidelijk te maken? Het antwoord is: ‘nog niet’. De huidige prioriteiten liggen elders.


De opvattingen over het milieu die de natuur als onschendbaar zien, zoals de Deep Ecology stroming, drukken in feite een neopaganistische overtuiging uit, die diametraal tegengesteld is aan Joodse waarden. De oorsprong van het Jodendom ligt in de erkenning van een God en in de strijd tegen heidendom en afgoden.

Deze ideologische onverenigbaarheid heeft weinig praktische consequenties. Gezien de beperkte invloed van de Deep Ecologystroming is haar dreiging minimaal. Geen enkel land wordt immers geregeerd door aanhangers van deze ideologie. Het Jodendom beschouwt voorts een aantal doelen van milieubewegingen als positief zoals het besparen van energie, het voorkomen van afval en de bescherming van de natuur.

Er zijn concrete conflicten tussen Jodendom en sommige milieurelevante opvattingen, in het bijzonder zoals die worden uitgedragen door dierenbeschermingsorganisaties met betrekking tot ritueel slachten. Deze spanningen bestonden reeds lang voor de moderne milieubewegingen belangrijk werden. Aangezien deze zich met zo veel onderwerpen bezighouden en de onderliggende waarden zo verschillend zijn van de Joodse, is het mogelijk dat zich toekomstige conflicten op andere gebieden ontwikkelen.

Omdat de praktische spanningen tussen milieubeweging en Jodendom minimaal zijn is er voor de Joodse gemeenschap in de wereld weinig noodzaak haar de facto standpunt te veranderen dat de specifieke interactie met milieubewegingen laag op de Joodse agenda kan blijven.


Hier ligt een belangrijke uitdaging voor het Jodendom. Een beter begrip van de milieuproblematiek, inclusief de verwarring daaromheen, is vereist teneinde klassieke Joodse bronnen die relevant zijn voor milieuaangelegenheden te identificeren en te interpreteren. Dit zal het inzicht van Joodse enkelingen en gemeenschappen in de milieuproblematiek verscherpen.

Hierdoor wordt de basis gelegd voor een meer algemene Joodse visie op milieuvaagstukken uitgaande van de huidige belangstelling
voor een aantal individuele aspecten van deze problematiek. Deze laatste leidt vaak tot een apologetische benadering. De verworvenheden en tekortkomingen van milieubewegingen kunnen dan geanalyseerd worden vanuit een meer algemene geconsolideerde visie van het oude Joodse waardensysteem.

Er is zoveel interactie tussen Jodendom en milieu mogelijk – op zo onderscheiden terreinen – dat er ruimte is voor een nieuwe wetenschappelijke discipline: Joodse milieustudie. Door alle interacties als elementen van een dergelijk geheel te beschouwen kan beduidende wetenschappelijke vooruitgang geboekt worden. Dit zal tot een diepergaand begrip van Joodse houdingen ten aanzien van het milieu leiden.
Summary

The central question addressed here is: “How does Judaism view modern environmentalism and environmental matters?”

For the purposes of this analysis, ‘Judaism’ has been defined as the world of Jewish thought – particularly its religious aspects – and the precepts for action which flow from it. Attention is also given, albeit more briefly, to Judaism’s cultural and national thought.

The phrase ‘environmental matters’, as defined here, covers several fields. The main ones are man’s relationship with living nature, his attitude and behavior toward animals, his use of natural resources, the effects of pollution and nuisance on third parties, and issues pertinent to the allocation of space.

‘Modern environmentalism’ refers to those currents and individuals who consider protection of the ecosystem one of society’s central goals.

Serious public concern about the environment only began to develop in the second half of the twentieth century. However, the historical origins of this modern phenomenon in Western society can be traced back to the last century.

Several issues which have developed in modern times and are now considered environmental, were already of serious concern in Jewish thought many centuries ago. One finds a broad variety of references to such matters in the Bible, the Talmud, the responsa literature and other classical Jewish sources.

Halakha (Jewish law) determines the observant Jew’s behavior in many aspects of life. This includes ancient laws which would now be defined as ‘environmental’. They deal with issues such as nature protection, animal welfare, pollution control and environmental hygiene.

Any attempt to arrive at a consolidated Jewish position with regard to the natural world or modern environmentalism must start with a review of the classical Jewish sources. It is in this area that this study’s main effort lies.

Chapter One deals with the touching points between Judaism and modern environmentalism.

Several aspects of modern environmentalism inspire interest and/or caution in contemporary Jewish writers. In order to understand this better, some attention is given to the historical development of the movement and its major characteristics.
Due to its diversity and fragmentation, modern environmentalism is difficult to define. For some people it is a universal ideology which concerns the relationship between man and nature. Others describe it as a value system, or a scientifically-based philosophy. A less far-reaching description is that it is a collection of rather divergent beliefs and/or opinions in which environmental matters are central. For many others, environmentalism is a pragmatic approach to protecting one's health, controlling waste, preventing pollution, and eliminating other environmental threats to both mankind and living nature.

As one cannot easily define or understand environmentalism, it is hard to form a balanced opinion on its many aspects. Thus it is a complex mission to determine an overall Jewish attitude toward this multi-faceted field, and discussion between the two worlds is complicated.

Judaism – particularly its Orthodox component – tends to take a rather detached view of environmentalism. One possible explanation is that it does not provide a challenge to the Jewish people, who have many more urgent problems to deal with, including concerns for the physical safety of Israel and the cultural-religious threat of assimilation.

The instances of interaction between Judaism and modern environmentalism, often still in a nascent state, are dispersed over a vast, incoherent, largely uncharted area. The current study deals mainly with issues which relate to the religious rather than the sociological, cultural or political aspects of the Jewish position on the environment. Neither does it deal extensively with the analysis of the environmental attitudes of the State of Israel, the dominant political expression of the Jewish people. Some reference is made in this chapter to issues such as post-Biblical history, Zionism, the kibbutz movement, Israeli and Diaspora attitudes, and organized Jewish environmentalists.

Another meeting-point between Judaism and environmentalism can be illustrated by the ways in which modern Israeli and Jewish writers perceive environmental issues in novels, poetry and other writings. However, this is mainly left for further study.

Chapter Two analyzes the Jewish reaction to environmentalism. Judaism was initially drawn into the environmental discussion because of the 'spoliation of nature' debate. In the late 1960s and early '70s, some publications – mainly in the United States – claimed that Judeo-Christianity had laid the ideological basis for the current environmental crisis. These accusations included claims that a passage in Genesis legitimizes man's exploitation of nature for his own ends. A major source of these accusations was an often quoted 1967 article by the American historian Lynn White Jr.
In the – mostly unstructured – debate on the attitude of Judaism toward the environment, Jewish writers write from a variety of motives. They seem to share almost no common view on the subject, other than the motivation to write about it and the belief that it is a genuinely problematic issue.

The number of Jewish writers who explain their motives on this issue may be small, but the range of positions they represent is wide: from the attitudes of catastrophists to those of ‘contrarians’, who are of the opinion that environmental issues hardly exist or are not problematic. Some publications refer to many aspects of environmental consciousness in Judaism, stressing harmony between Judaism and environmentalism; others see significant tensions between them.

Some of these tensions arise from various neo-pagan elements in environmentalism, and the similarities in the approach of some environmentalists to that of the Nazis in their love of animals and nature (as the latter also combined with the hatred of certain humans). Other tensions concern the relatively strong position of the Green political party in Germany and the anti-Israel attitude of some European Green politicians.

The main interests of most Jewish writers on environmental issues lie in other fields, and their forays into environmentalism may be considered incidental. Most of them reveal a limited understanding of the subject.

Despite their limited numbers, Jewish publications available on the subject of Judaism and environmentalism raise many motifs and themes. Those reviewed here express a diverse religious Jewish background, from Orthodox to Reconstructionist. The writers reveal a wide spectrum of views on nature and its destruction. Nonetheless, there are specific boundaries which are never crossed. Biocentricity seems so indefensible that few Jewish writers even approach it. Declaring nature holy, and caring so little about nature as to destroy it without reason are both considered totally unacceptable.

Chapter Three deals with environmentally relevant themes in Halakha. Halakha prescribes rules to be followed by Jews in many areas of life. Reviewing this vast body of law indicates classical Jewish attitudes in several areas of environmental relevance. These may be broken down into various categories and issues:

a) Principles referring to the prohibition of wanton destruction.
b) Halakhot in the broad area of health protection and nuisance limitation. Both Bible and Talmud give many examples of pollution prevention and abatement to prevent hindrance to others.
c) Laws concerning land policies and soil protection, including commandments concerning sabbatical and jubilee years.
d) Halakhot referring to animal protection.
e) Laws prescribing constancy of species.
f) Laws defining elements of the layout of Levite cities and refuge towns that are, to some extent, precursors of the modern concept of sustainable cities.
g) The Shabbat laws, containing several elements of environmental relevance.
h) Other halakhic rules of environmental relevance, such as the dietary laws (kashrui) and fasting.
i) Halakha pertinent to the conflict between environmental and economic interests.

Many of these rulings apply to Jews everywhere; others pertain only to the land of Israel. From the above list, it is clear that a body of what we would now call 'Jewish environmental law' has existed for many centuries, although it is not concentrated in a separate codex. Together, these rulings cover many environmental aspects of industrial/mass consumption society.

In general, contemporary Halakha has barely referred to environmental matters: when it has done so, it has been in a scattered manner. Among the issues dealt with in responsa in recent years, a prominent one is passive smoking – a phenomenon which can cause nuisance and health damage to others. There has also been some recent halakhic discussion on the Jewish attitude toward vegetarianism. Authorities who have based their views on the same sources have reached diverse conclusions on this subject. Animal experimentation is another contemporary issue to which some halakhic attention has been given.

The idea that the corpus of Halakha could be substantially extended and developed to deal with a variety of contemporary environmental issues is rarely posited, but the Jewish tradition has great potential in this field. Applying Halakha to problematic areas where both value and pragmatic judgments need to be made, may become Judaism's most important contribution in the environmental field.

The mechanisms for setting this process in motion need not be complex. In the future, halakhic scholars may find environmental Halakha of interest, acquire a specialized knowledge in this field and start developing it. Another possibility is that concerned citizens may start to pose environment-related halakhic questions, and may find rabbinical authorities willing to study and answer them.

In cases of conflict of interest, Halakha determines which interest takes precedence. Such hierarchies are also clearly shown in the
value judgments which emerge from the narrative, prophetic and wisdom texts of the Bible, and from later literature such as the Aggadah. By systematically analyzing hierarchies in the various types of classical Jewish sources, a larger map of Jewish views on the environment could be developed, setting out how several elements of the eco-system fit into the Jewish value system. A contribution to this is made in this chapter.

Chapter Four discusses Jewish attitudes to environmental issues in the Bible’s narrative.

Additional insights into Jewish attitudes to environmental issues can be gleaned from the Bible’s non-halakhic writings. A sizable number of references to the subject is found in its narrative, prophetic and wisdom texts. Modern Jewish writings have given little attention to this. Thus, while most of the Torah’s Halakhot with environmental aspects have probably been identified by now, this is not necessarily the case with other Bible texts.

Four different approaches are proposed which, together, provide environmentally relevant views as expressed in the Bible’s narrative:

One can review those stories in the Bible which have obvious environmental aspects, as currently defined, and analyze them from an environmental viewpoint – occasionally even with the methods, instruments and categorization of modern environmentalism and environmental studies. For instance, Paradise and life in it can be analyzed with the tools of the environmental audit and environmental impact assessment. In some cases, this approach can help to identify where religious and modern environmentalist views overlap or diverge.

Following these methods, some Biblical stories (the Garden of Eden, the Flood) can be considered almost as environmental paradigms. Others, such as the story of the Ten Plagues, have several environmental aspects.

A further clarification of classical Judaism’s views on the environment can be gained by reviewing the Bible texts included in the Orthodox prayer book. Those most relevant to our subject generally refer to nature. This selection reflects those Biblical concepts which the rabbis composing the prayers in post-Biblical times wished to emphasize.

Modern Jewish publications can be reviewed, in order to see how they interpret various non-halakhic Bible passages. Further insight can be obtained from the way various Jewish commentators have interpreted Bible texts with environmental elements. This is particularly relevant with regard to stories like the Flood and the Ten Plagues.
The attitude toward the environment that is revealed in the Bible's narrative is reviewed through analysis of a number of subjects:

a) the Paradise story;
b) nature and the stories dealing with man's attitude toward natural resources;
c) the position of animals in the Biblical narrative, and
d) pollution.

From the viewpoint of both modern environmentalism and Judaism, Paradise was an ideal location. In its messianic thought, Judaism strives for similar harmony at the end of days. Environmentalism aims for sustainability. Thus the ideals of these two radically diverse spheres have much in common, although their approaches, values and motives are entirely different. Environmental and religious views can be compared in other cases, thereby clarifying the differences in approach of these two worlds of thought.

Another major Biblical theme is the role of nature. The Bible conveys two main messages: that it is a manifestation of God's majesty and that man should recognize this; and that, as it is God's creation, He may use and even change it as He wishes. The latter means, for instance, that God can transform non-living into living nature, or destroy living nature. Its normal functioning is subject to obeying Divine commandments.

The Bible contains many such examples of nature's modification – in more traditional language, miracles – as a tool of punishment for communities and individuals. The most extreme case is the Flood in which – with the exception of Noah's family – all humanity and large parts of the ecosystem are destroyed. Others include the destruction of the city of Sodom, because ten righteous men cannot be found there. Lot's wife is turned into a pillar of salt because, while being saved from the disaster, she does not obey the one Divine instruction given on this occasion: not to look back.

The story of the Ten Plagues is the main example of a series of modifications of nature as a tool of Divine punishment. Few other Biblical stories relate in such detail the relations between God, man and nature in Judaism. Humanity must obey God; if it does not, nature can be used in extraordinary ways to punish it.

The Bible also tells us a number of basic things about natural resources:

a) they are in God's hand;
b) if people are dissatisfied with God-given natural resources, they may incur God's wrath;
c) sometimes they are scarce and become a bone of contention;
d) they should be used wisely.
Similarly, the Bible provides many perspectives on animals and their position in society. The themes addressed can be summarized as follows:

a) animal sacrifice as a substitute for human sacrifices;  
b) animals as a tool of divine punishment;  
c) animals cannot be wantonly destroyed;  
d) animals should be treated well;  
e) animals are held responsible for their deeds;  
f) animals can also be used in metaphors.

Many more themes emerge from a modern environmental reading of the Bible. This includes issues of pollution, recycling and the way in which environmental problems affect the economy.

Chapter Five refers to additional environmental motifs in the *Aggadah* literature.

A broad variety of environmental themes are addressed in classical Jewish religious literature. This field requires more substantial exploration than it has received to date. The examples given in this chapter are indicative of the potential wealth of environmental material in the *Aggadah*.

The *Aggadah* texts lend themselves to multiple, sometimes contradictory, interpretations. This is illustrated in modern Jewish writings, which give many different interpretations of the often quoted *Midrash*: “God said to Adam: See my works, see how pleasant and good they are. Everything I have created I have created for you. Be careful not to spoil and destroy my world. If you do so no one will repair it.”

A broad spectrum of environmentally relevant themes are developed. One group concerns links between abstract concepts such as sacredness and righteousness, on the one hand, and concrete issues such as decay, putrefaction, destruction, disease, death and natural disaster on the other.

Many other motifs from the *Aggadah* demonstrate an ancient Jewish interest in issues which are now considered environmentally relevant. This includes matters such as silence versus noise, avoiding conspicuous consumption, protecting biodiversity, compassion for animals, the importance of tree-planting and intergenerational equity.

**Conclusions**

Read together, the various classical Jewish sources referring to environmental matters show prescribed behavior and thought to be coherent.
An integrated review of the environmental halakhic rules clarifies that the discussion as to whether Judaism is anthropocentric or biocentric is misplaced. In fact, it is theocentric.

There are many limitations in Jews’ behavior that have environmental relevance. The observant Jew is not free to eat all that is available, whenever it is available; even within marriage, he or she is not allowed to have sexual intercourse whenever they please.

On one day of the week, the Shabbat, activities and movements are limited. The same is true for the Holy Days. There is no full freedom to do with one’s property as one wishes. There are halakhic prohibitions against causing pain to animals or random wanton destruction of both nature and inanimate matter. Halakha is opposed to many elements of conspicuous consumption, and its multiple rules set behavioral limits on such an attitude. Together with other constraints with an environmental impact that are detailed in other commandments, these mean that the Jew is not free to do with his environment whatever he wants.

Does Judaism have anything to say to environmentalists? Put this way, the question is difficult to answer, and requires additional questions such as ‘which Judaism?’ and ‘explicitly or implicitly?’ Contemporary Judaism is so heterogeneous that the answer can only be that certain Jews feel that they have something to say to environmentalists in the name of Judaism, but these views are not necessarily shared by many other Jews.

Phrasing the question differently – does classical Judaism or its continued contemporary expression, Orthodoxy, have anything to say to environmentalists? The answer is ‘not directly’, because Judaism does not address adherents of any particular ‘ism’.

Firstly, Orthodoxy speaks mainly to Jews. However, it does have a message for humanity in general which includes environmental matters. Its view is that all mankind should respect the Noachide commandments. These include two environmentally relevant components: the first is that there is only one God, Who should be revered; thus there is no place for the sanctification of nature or elements of it. God can make things sacred; He did not make nature so. The second is that animals should not be cruelly treated.

There may also be many implicit matters for Orthodox Judaism to convey to environmentalists, through both the halakhic system and its world of thought. As environmentalism is such a fragmented movement, each person or group will have to determine whether this is a matter of interest to them. Should Orthodox Judaism see it as an important task to carry the implicit message to the nations of
its own initiative? The answer seems to be ‘not yet’: the priorities on its agenda are different.

Judaism and modern environmentalism sometimes coincide in their approaches to various practical issues. However, they have radically different origins, and their main concerns are often on quite diverse tracks. Neither do they aim at similar goals. Even where their positions do overlap, they draw from different points of view within different value systems.

The more environmentalist currents acquire the character of a value system (which sees the protection of the ecosystem as the central task of society), the more alien their views are to Judaism (which sees obedience to God as the central value). There is no place within Judaism for two central values.

Those environmentalists who see nature as sacrosanct are expressing the beliefs of neo-paganism, which is diametrically opposed to the world of Jewish values. Judaism’s origins lie in the affirmation of a single God and in the struggle against paganism and its idols. This ideological incompatibility has few practical consequences as the threats that deep ecology poses to Judaism are minimal. There are no countries with deep ecologist rulers, and its influence as a value system is limited. Judaism looks favorably on a variety of the environmental movement’s aims, such as energy saving, waste prevention and nature conservation.

There is conflict between Judaism and some environmentalist positions (particularly as represented by the animal protection movements) with regard to ritual slaughter. These tensions existed well before modern environmentalism became a mainstream movement. As the latter deals with so many issues and its values are so different from Judaism, future tensions may well develop on other issues.

Because the practical tensions between environmentalism and Judaism are so weak, there is currently little need for the worldwide Jewish community to change its de facto view that interaction with environmentalist currents can remain low on the Jewish agenda.

Now that a more responsible attitude toward the environment is being taken, in the near future Jewish concern for environmental matters will have to find its main expression in participation in the actions of society in general. The political and behavioral aspects of this will thus require some attention from organized Judaism. To the extent that environmental issues have specific Jewish aspects, these should mainly be dealt with in the scholarly domain.

It is here that the current major environmental challenge to Judaism lies. A much better understanding of the environmental discourse, its underlying motifs and perplexities will remain a precondition for
the identification and competent reading of classical Jewish sources relevant to environmental matters. As a result, the sensibilities of individual Jews and communities toward environmental requirements may be sharpened.

This may lay the basis for a more general Jewish vision on environmental issues, starting from the current interest in a few individual aspects of this problem complex. The latter often leads to an apologetic approach. Environmentalism's achievements and flaws can then be looked at from a more consolidated appreciation of the ancient Jewish value system.

There are so many areas – with such diverse elements – of interaction between Judaism and the environment that there is room for a separate field of Jewish environmental studies. By seeing the various Jewish environmental issues as part of a whole, significant scholarly progress can be made to deepen understanding of Jewish attitudes toward the environment.
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