

Cherishing the Waters that Sustain Creation

A Jewish Perspective On Climate Change

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*“...without earth there is no rain, and without rain the earth cannot endure,
and without either, humans cannot exist.”*

Genesis Rabbah 13:3



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that our existence depends on natural systems we did not create and cannot control. We praise God for “creating light and fashioning darkness, ordaining the order of all creation.” (Morning Service)

Responding to climate change is one of the most significant moral and spiritual challenges facing humanity today. As Jews joining together with other people of faith, we look to our Government with hope, and we urge our elected representatives to show leadership and commit themselves to act courageously to set a new course for our country and the world.

The changes that scientists predict will occur due to climate change are so many and so complex that it is difficult for us to grasp them. Thankfully, humanity has the capacity not only to influence the climate, but also to observe and understand the changes taking place. Among these changes are changes in the water cycle.

Judaism teaches us to feel awe and humility as we consider our place in creation. Our daily prayers remind us

How can we not feel humbled when we contemplate the water cycle? We are awed by this incredible natural system in which water rises from the sea as vapor, returns to the surface of the earth as rain, flows in streams and rivers, lingers for a time as ice in glaciers and then returns to the sea again.

The molecules of water we drink today date back to the creation of the world. The water system is a closed cycle with only a few molecules being added as snow balls or comets enter the Earth's atmosphere.

Human beings could never create such a system, and yet we are capable of disrupting it.

As the planet warms, changes in the climate will be felt to a great extent through water. Complex relationships between natural systems will lead to devastating effects. We expect both floods and drought. Melting glaciers will reduce freshwater storage. The warming of the oceans will stimulate the growth of plankton which will spread diseases such as cholera.

For thousands of years Jews have expressed our appreciation for the value of water. Before we take a drink of water we thank God who with a word, according to Genesis, separated the primordial waters from dry land.

Water sustains us. But now our own actions will make water a frequent vehicle of destruction.

Water is essential to our hygiene and health. Through the generations we have also sought spiritual purity through water. But now water is increasingly a transmitter of death and disease.

The prophets associated water with justice: "Let justice well up like water, righteousness like an unending stream" (Amos 5:24). But now injustice will be felt through water as poor people and poor countries will be most affected by changes in the climate.

Judaism teaches that human beings are made in the image of God and that we have a responsibility to emulate God. We have the ability to be creative, to give sustenance, to act with compassion. We have the capacity to end our consumption of dangerous polluting fuels, to expand our use of alternative means to provide ourselves with energy, and restore the natural systems we have degraded. We can protect and restore the waters that sustain us.

May we cherish the waters of the Earth, and act swiftly to protect all of creation from the threats of climate change.

Dr. Mirele B. Goldsmith attended the UN Summit on Climate Change in Copenhagen on behalf of 22 Jewish organizations.