

Protection of the Environment in Judaism

Sources

1. Ecclesiastes 7:13

Consider the work of God; for who can make that straight, which man has made crooked?

2. Ecclesiastes Rabbah 7

When God created Adam, he showed him all the trees of the Garden of Eden and said to him: See my works, how lovely they are, how fine they are. All I have created, I created for you. Take care not to corrupt and destroy my universe, for if you destroy it, no one will come after you to put it right.

3. Leviticus 25:23

And the land shall not be sold in perpetuity, for the land is Mine, for you are strangers and settlers with Me.

4. Genesis 2:15

And God took the man, and put him into the garden of Eden to use it and protect it.

5. Leviticus 25:3

Six years you shall sow your field, and six years you shall prune your vineyard, and gather in their produce. But in the seventh year shall be a sabbath of solemn rest for the land, a sabbath unto God; you shall neither sow your field, nor prune your vineyard.

6. Maimonides, *Guide for the Perplexed* (trans. Shlomo Pines), III:39.

R. Moshe ben Maimon (1135-1204), was born in Cordoba, Spain. He was the most distinguished Jewish authority of the Middle Ages.

With regard to all the commandments that we have enumerated in Laws concerning the Sabbatical year and the Jubilee, some of them... are meant to make the earth more fertile and stronger through letting it fallow.

7. *Sefer haHinnukh*, commandment 84 (ed. Chavel, commandment 69)

So that man will remember that the earth which yields its produce for him each year, does not do so on its own strength or of itself, but rather there is one who is Master over the land and its owners, and when He wishes, He commands that the produce be ownerless.

8. Genesis 1:26

And God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth."

9. R. Avraham Yitzhak haKohen Kook, "Hazon haTzimhonut vohaShalom" (*Lahai Ro'i*, Jerusalem, 1961, p. 207)

Rav Kook (1865-1935) was the first chief rabbi of the Land of Israel. Philosopher, scholar, legal authority, and mystic, he was one of the outstanding Jewish personalities of recent generations.

There can be no doubt to any enlightened or thoughtful person, that the "dominion" mentioned in the Bible in the phrase, "and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that creeps upon the earth," is not the dominion of a tyrant who deals harshly with his people and servants in order to achieve his own personal desires and whims. It would be unthinkable to legislate so repugnant a subjugation and have it forever engraved upon the world of God, who is good to all and whose mercy extends to all He has created, as is written, "the earth is founded upon mercy" (Ps. 89:3).

10. Tosefta, *Baba Kama* 2:10.

It happened that a certain person was removing stones from his ground onto public ground when a pious man found him and said, "Fool, why do you remove stones from ground which is not yours to ground which is yours?" The man laughed at him. Some time later he was compelled to sell his field, and when he was walking on that public ground, he stumbled over the stones he had thrown there. He then said, "How well did that pious man say to me, 'Why do you remove stones from ground which is not yours to ground which is yours?'".

11. Deuteronomy 20:19

When you shall besiege a city a long time, in making war against it to take it, you shall not destroy the trees thereof by wielding an axe against them; for you may eat of them, but you shall not cut them down; for is the tree of the field man, that it should be besieged by you?

12. *Sefer haHinnukh*, commandment 529 (ed. Chavel, commandment 530)

This commandment is meant to teach us to love the good and the useful and cling to them, and in this way goodness will cling to us, and we will avoid all that is bad and decadent. And this is the way of

the pious: They love peace and rejoice in the good fortune of others, and bring everyone near to the Torah, and do not waste even a mustard seed, and they are pained by all destruction and waste that they psee. And they save anything they can from destruction with all their might.

13. R. Aryeh Levine (the "prisoners' rabbi"), in: Simcha Raz, *A Tzadik in Our Times* (Jerusalem, 1976), pp. 108-109.

I recall the early days, from 1905 onward, when it was granted me by the grace of the blessed Lord to go up to the holy land, and I came to Jaffa. There I first went to visit our great master R. Abraham Isaac Kook (of blessed memory), who received me with good cheer, as it was his hallowed custom to receive everyone. We chatted together on themes of Torah study. After the afternoon service, he went out, as was his custom, to stroll a bit in the fields and gather his thoughts; and I went along. While strolling with him, I plucked some branch or flower. Our great master was taken aback; and then he told me gently, "Believe me. In all my days I have taken care never to pluck a blade of grass or flower needlessly, when it had the ability to grow or blossom. You know the teaching of the Sages that there is not a single blade of grass below, here on earth, which does not have a heavenly force telling it *Grow!* Every sprout and leaf of grass says something, conveys some meaning. Every stone whispers some inner, hidden message in the silence. Every creation utters its song (in praise of the Creator)." ... From that time on, I began to feel a strong sense of compassion for everything.

14. Berakhot 57b

Three things restore a man's consciousness: [beautiful] sounds, sights, and fragrances. Three things enlarge a man's spirit: a beautiful dwelling, a beautiful wife, and beautiful clothes.

15. R. Avraham Yitzhak haKohen Kook, *Ein Ayah, Berakhot*, ad loc

God created the human soul simple, happy with its life, and taking satisfaction in its emotions. As long as man adapts his life to nature, he finds happiness and gladness of the heart. In the conflicts of society, however, man became distant from the pure natural emotions, and his consciousness became clouded. Therefore, that which will restore the natural balance of his consciousness is the general mutual satisfaction that man finds in nature, God's mercy that fills the universe: the **sound** of the song of birds, who sing among the branches (Psalms 104:12), the **sight** of the beauty of the Carmel, the Sharon in bloom, the **fragrance** of roses and every desirable fruit in God's garden, the earth which

He gave to man. These are what restore the natural consciousness after his becoming distanced from it by culture and society.

16. Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah, Berakhot 10:13*

On seeing creatures that are beautiful or exceptionally well formed or goodly trees, one says, “Blessed are You, O Lord our God, King of the universe who has such as these in His world.” If one goes out into the fields or gardens during the month of Nisan [i.e., the spring] and sees the trees in bud and the flowers in bloom, he says, “Blessed are You, O Lord our God, King of the universe, who has made Your world Lacking in nought.”

17. R. Avraham Yitzhak haKohen Kook, *Orot haKodesh II*, p. 444

Harmony in Four Parts

One man sings the song of his own soul, for it is there that his satisfaction is complete.

Another sings the song of his people, transcending the bounds of his own individual soul. . . cleaving with tender love to the Jewish people, singing her songs with her. . . .

A third man's soul expands beyond the Jewish people to sing the song of man, his spirit embraces all humanity, majestic reflection of God. . . .

And a fourth is transported still higher, uniting with the entire universe, with all creatures, and all worlds, with all of these does he sing. . .