

It Isn't Easy Being Green: Building a Jewish Environmental Ethic
Study Guide
KOACH Shabbat 2010

Welcome to this year's **KOACH** Shabbat Study Guide! We are delighted that you are participating in this very exciting program, shared by dozens of campuses and hundreds of students across North America.

We're providing two categories of text resources this year, from a variety of sources. They offer both general conversation on Judaism and the environment and two case studies on conflicting sets of values in tradition. These materials will provide more than enough food for thought for at least two study sessions. Feel free to pick and choose as you see fit. Recommendations below will provide guidelines on how to best use the materials relative to the time available.

In a spare moment while everyone is gathered, **please promote our annual gathering of college students, the 2011 KOACH Kallah**. This year's Kallah will take place at Northwestern University in Evanston, IL, February 24-27. Scholar in residence Professor Louis Newman of Carleton College will speak on *Our Values, Our Dollars: Judaism and the Starving College Student*. Perhaps that's a good time to distribute the chocolates we've sent to the campus as a sweet Shabbat treat! (they are pareve and nut-free, though prepared on equipment used for nuts)

Thank you again for your involvement with this project. If you have any questions, please be in touch with Rabbi Elyse Winick, Associate Director for **KOACH** at winick@uscj.org or 857 231 3690; you'll receive an online evaluation shortly after **KOACH** Shabbat. Please help us out and complete it in a timely manner!

Shabbat Shalom!

If you are doing two sessions (read on for single session guidance).....

Allow an hour to an hour and a half per session.

Session One

1. Open with an icebreaker and/or introductions. (need icebreaker ideas? <http://wilderdom.com/games/Icebreakers.html>) Invite people to introduce themselves and tell about the changes they have made in their own lives to be more environmentally responsible and what motivated them. (10-15 minutes)
2. Invite people to enter into a conversation about the ways in which their campus is becoming more green. What isn't happening that should? (10-15 minutes)
3. Describe the concept of studying in *hevruta*, in pairs. This is the traditional method of encountering Jewish text, in conversation. One teacher once remarked that the library is the most anti-Semitic of Jewish institutions, because it requires quiet. The study of Jewish text is dependent on the interplay of past and present and the presence of the knowledge and life stories of the study partners. Make some noise! (5 minutes)
4. The first set of texts focuses on the basic textual premises on which our environmental vision could be founded. Begin with the two Biblical texts, from Psalms. What does each tell us about our relationship with the world? Who bears responsibility? What are

- the logical implications of each text for issues like deforestation, the Gulf oil spill and genetically modified foods? How might they be in conflict? How might they inform one another? (10-15 minutes)
5. Texts 2-3 offer other Biblical texts which address environmental concerns. Encourage the *hevrotot* to read both. What are the contextual circumstances which generate the instructions? What contemporary concerns might these texts address? How can we draw each out from its literal meaning to its figurative implications? (note that text 2 is the origin of the concept of Bal Tashhit, the prohibition against (10-15 minutes)
 6. Texts 4 and 5 offer rabbinic exegesis which gives us insights into the Rabbis' sense of environmental responsibility. What are the biblical concerns to which they refer? Using these sources and texts 2 and 3, go back to the verses from Psalms and discuss the overall environmental vision you think they suggest when viewed together. (10 minutes)
 7. In conclusion: look at the text excerpted from *U'netaneh Tokef* from the High Holy Day liturgy. Consider the parameters of this prayer. How have participants experienced it? Has anyone ever seen it through an environmental lens? If it doesn't come out naturally from the conversation, raise the question of collective responsibility – might my (mis)use of nature's resources result in someone else's punishment by fire or water? Share this quote from Abraham Joshua Heschel: "Some are guilty; all are responsible." What might this suggest about personal responsibility?

Session Two (you need to keep reading if you're only able to do one session!)

Allow an hour to an hour and a half

1. Introductions all around once more. Invite people to share thoughts from the previous session. Did they learn anything unexpected? Did they find texts to be compelling? Invite them to share examples of ways they have seen environmental responsibility grow during their lifetime? (10 minutes)
2. Divide into *hevrotot* again and look at the first Case Study, focusing on the conflict between our responsibility to protect the environment and our need for personal financial stability. Texts 6 and 7 give a rabbinic view of how to protect cities (and their inhabitants) from pollutants. How do they differ? What are the other concerns in Text 7 which go beyond Text 6? How do you understand the claims in Text 7 about planting gardens and orchards? Text 8 is an example of a *teshuvah*, a rabbinic response to a halakhic question. The full *teshuvah* is an inquiry about a variety of neighborly behaviors. Our excerpt is an answer to whether or not dye vats can be kept in a private home. How does the Maharshach respond to the conflict between two sets of values? (20 minutes)
3. Case Study II asks us to consider whether the *kashrut* of a food item is sufficient to make it fit for consumption. How do Texts 9 and 10 show the progress from our vegetarian origins (the Creation story) to the beginnings of our lives as meat eaters (the Noah story). How do Texts 11 and 12 inform our thinking about our responsibility to animals? What does Text 11 add to what we learn from Text 12? Text 13 tells an important story about kindness to animals. What does the conclusion do to your understanding of the obligation? Text 14 helps us link our concerns about animals and our obligation to *kashrut*. What are the issues which Rambam considers to be relevant? On what basis would he be saying this? Text 15, though brief, gives us the origin of the catchphrase by

- which our concern for animals is known. The preceding discussion in Baba Metzia is based on our Texts 11 and 12 – what is the import of this brief statement? How does this underscore Rambam’s statement? In what way does it transform our discussion? Text 16 is excerpted from a contemporary responsum from the Committee of Jewish Law and Standards of the Rabbinical Assembly (CJLS). The CJLS is the halakhic governing body for the Conservative Movement. These passages include the question, summary and final decision; many of the texts from our Case Study appear in the body of the *teshuvah*. Read the excerpts and link the background texts to its conclusions. (20 minutes)
4. In conclusion: How do these value conflicts inform your thinking about environmental responsibility? Do they offer a definitive answer or resolution? What other conflicts like these can you think of? Can you draw out the relevant Jewish values? (consider: wind farms off the coast of Cape Cod and other alternative energy sources; disposable vs cloth diapers (landfill vs energy consumption), hot air dryers in restrooms vs recycled paper towels)

If you’re only doing one session....

Allow an hour to an hour and a half and use the following elements from the two session model:

From Session One: 1, 2, 4, 6

From Session Two: 2, 4

Conclude with 7 from Session One

Enjoy! Should you have any questions about this material, please contact Rabbi Elyse Winick, Associate Director for **KOACH** at winick@uscj.org.

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