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Jewish Environmentalism in Higher Education: Greening Your Jewish Campus Organization

by Dan Waxman

Jewish organizations on campuses contribute greatly to many students' formation of a Jewish identity. These organizations should become more environmentally sustainable and include Jewish environmental programming. Also, students may connect even more with the environment by visiting Israel through a birthright Israel program.

Recycling

There are many projects that an organization can do and, often, the first that comes to mind is recycling. Organizations can recycle many things, depending on the campus or community, including paper, plastic bottles, magazines, glass, aluminum cans, and batteries.

Energy and Water Conservation

Conduct an energy and water-conservation audit and try to reduce waste. Signage may be posted in key locations to remind people to turn off lights and faucets. CFLs and energy star products should be purchased to help reduce costs. Organizations also may look into water-efficient infrastructure such as faucet aerators and water-free urinals, if appropriate.

Garden and Composting

Create an organic garden with composting. In its garden, an organization could plant herbs for *Havdallah*. This also would be a great teaching tool for teaching about the connection to the land.

Green purchasing

Purchase environmentally friendly products, such as those made from recycled materials and those that contain less packaging material. Seventh Generation is one line of products known for being environmentally friendly. Additionally, organizations may be interested in purchasing resources for their libraries.

Tzedekah

Donate money to Jewish environmental causes. The cause may be a local organization or to plant a tree in Israel through JNF.

Jewish Environmental Programming

Eco-Shabbat

Creating an environmentally-based program, possibly utilizing the outdoors, is a great way to celebrate *Shabbat*. Students could help with environmental readings; a special dinner possibly featuring organic, local, and/or vegan options; decorations; an *oneg Shabbat*; place settings, and possibly a special *dvar Torah*. This program also could be extended into a weekend-long happening, coupled with a variety of Jewish environmental activities.

Speakers

Consider bringing to campus speakers who are active in Jewish environmental organizations. Also, consider environmentalists who are Jewish, but not necessarily active in Jewish organizations. Both are important in serving as role models for college students.

Connect the Environment and Jewish Holidays

Look for connections between the environment and Jewish holidays. This can help “green” the year’s programming. One idea is to discuss the four species during *Sukkot*. Another is to hold a *seder* for *Tu B’Shevat*.

Classes and Programs

Consider programming about Jewish environmental values such as *Bal Tashchit* and *tikkun olam*. Another idea is to have a program regarding the seven species of Israel.

Campus Environmental Programs

Take part in campus-wide environmental initiatives, such as clean-ups, storm drain marking, and Earth Day events. Also partner with other student organizations and departments regarding campus programming, when applicable.

Taglit-birthright israel

Taglit-birthright israel provides Jewish young adults 18-26 who have never visited Israel on an organized tour the generous opportunity to visit Israel. Many participants are college students. Through this program, many have had the chance to experience Israel’s amazing natural world. Below you can read some quotations from recent participants in birthright.

While in Israel, one may also include Jewish environmental activities such as a cleaning up a physical location or planting a tree. Hillel also offers organized trips that utilize environmental principles that enable participants to recycle, stay at environmentally friendly locations, and reduce waste from meals.

Through greening, programming, and birthright israel, your campus can enhance Jewish environmentalism.

How has visiting Israel changed your connection with the environment?

"I now understand what all the 'fuss' is about concerning Israel. Even though vast parts are desert, its oases are unrivaled and the land is beautiful."

"I feel more of a connection to the physical land of Israel from hiking through where I knew my ancestors have walked before me."

"I was able to see how easy it is to use renewable energy in everyday life."

Stephen Lavenberg

"I would say that visiting Israel has made me appreciate the environment more. A fact that sticks out in my mind is that the Dead Sea will not be around in just a few short decades."

Andrew Lavenberg

Do you feel more connected with the environment after visiting Israel?

"Yes. Pictures would not do it justice; one has to see the land for itself."

"Yes, because it was (part of) the history of the Jewish people and this is the environment where everything began."

Douglas Lavenberg

How do you feel Judaism and the environment are connected?

"Judaism loves the land and its inhabitants. All of Israel is holy (such as the Golan Heights, Jerusalem, etc.) and Judaism's roots and values seem to be a product of Israel's environment."

"I feel that our ancestors were connected to the environment and respected how important it was to the future. They knew that it had to be sustained for future generations"

Andrew Lavenberg

"I feel that they are interconnected and play off of each other in terms of their history and their successes in culture and environmental enhancement."

Douglas Lavenberg

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