



RIVER OUT OF EDEN: WATER, ECOLOGY, AND THE JORDAN RIVER IN THE JEWISH TRADITION

ECOPEACE / FRIENDS OF THE EARTH MIDDLE EAST (FOEME)
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I saw trees in great profusion on both banks of the stream. This water runs out to the eastern region and flows into the Arabah; and when it comes into the Dead Sea, 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 here. It will be wholesome, and everything will live wherever this stream goes.

Ezekiel 47:7-9

COVENANT FOR THE JORDAN RIVER

We recognize that the Jordan River Valley is a landscape of outstanding ecological and cultural importance. It connects the eco-systems of Africa and Asia, forms a sanctuary for wild plants and animals, and has witnessed some of the most significant advances in human history. The first people ever to leave Africa walked through this valley and drank from its springs. Farming developed on these plains, and in Jericho we see the origins of urban civilization itself. Not least, the river runs through the heart of our spiritual traditions: some of the founding stories of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam are set along its banks and the valley contains sites sacred to half of humanity. By any measure, this landscape must be counted as part of the heritage of humankind.

But over the past 50 years, the Lower Jordan River has been destroyed. 96% of its historic flow has been diverted. What little water remains is polluted with saline and effluent, including untreated sewage. The valley's wetlands have dried up, its springs are failing, and half its biodiversity has been lost. This is not just a tragedy for wildlife: families have seen their fields turn to dust, not from a lack of water but from the injustice of its distribution.

The demise of the Jordan and the collapse of the valley's eco-system represents a failure of our most basic responsibility towards the species whose habitats have been destroyed and the ecological systems that sustain life on earth. It is a neglect that leaves us impoverished,

that cripples the growth of an economy based on tourism, and that exacerbates the political conflicts that divide this region. It also exemplifies a wider failure to serve as custodians of the planet: if we cannot protect a place of such exceptional value, what part of the earth will we hand on intact to our children?

We have a different vision of this valley: a vision in which a clean, living river flows from the Sea of Galilee to the Dead Sea; in which the valley's plants and animals are afforded the water they need to flourish; in which the springs flow as they have for millennia; and in which the water extracted for human use is divided equitably between the nations that share the valley and the people who live here.

Realizing this vision will not be easy. But difficulty cannot be an excuse for inaction. We therefore call upon the governments of the countries that share this watershed to make a serious commitment of resources and political capital to the rehabilitation of the Jordan River. As individuals and organizations, as members of civil society, and as religious or community leaders, we also affirm that this is a landscape of universal ecological, cultural, and spiritual importance, and commit to work towards the vision expressed in this covenant.

Dear Friend,

This is a toolkit intended to help Jewish communities around the world learn about the condition of the Jordan River and join the efforts to rehabilitate the once mighty river.

The first section describes the demise of the Jordan River, what went wrong, and why it matters. The second section provides a compilation of writings about the place of the Jordan River in the Jewish tradition, the sacredness of water, and the spiritual dimension of protecting and rehabilitating the natural world. Four essays about the state of the river and the role of the Jewish community in its rehabilitation have been included in the toolkit. You will also find sacred texts, prayers, poems, and essays. You are welcome to use these works as the basis for your own presentations or sermons or to adapt them to suit your audience.

Section three includes sample lesson plans and questions to assist educators in designing programs for a wide range of age groups. The final pages contain suggestions for how your community can support regional efforts to rehabilitate the Jordan River. We hope that you will urge decision makers to join in the revitalization of the Jordan. Additional resources to support awareness campaigns and plan visits to the river are available at www.SavetheJordan.com.

Please treat this as a working document: annotate it, select what is most illuminating, and enrich it through your own knowledge and insight. We hope that these materials inspire your congregation or class to join in the campaign to revive the Jordan River.

Thank you for participating in the campaign to revive the Jordan River.

With gratitude,
EcoPeace / Friends of the Earth Middle East
June 2014

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“The Jordan River is of enormous ecological, historical and spiritual significance both for the peoples who live in this Land and for those who hold it dear. Accordingly, its revivification is an urgent imperative for us all.”

Rabbi David Rosen
International President of Religions for Peace



I. BACKGROUND

The Jordan River has suffered an ecological collapse. What went wrong and why does it matter.



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THE GARDEN OF THE LORD

Four rivers merged in the Garden of Eden, the lush and fertile place of humanity's beginning. Eden was a place where humanity lived in close proximity to God. In later periods, the Jordan River served as a place where humanity could again come into contact with the Divine. It is a site of miracle and transformation where the People of Israel crossed into freedom, Elijah the Prophet ascended to heaven, and Naaman was healed and revived. In his vision of the future, the Prophet Ezekiel envisioned a river coursing through the land in order to purify the earth and usher in a new beginning. Similarly, we envision a 'flood event' to wash the toxins from the Jordan River Basin and restore the vital ecosystem.

Today, the river has been all but destroyed. 96% of its flow has been diverted. What little water remains is polluted with saline and untreated sewage. The valley's wetlands have dried up, its springs are failing, and half its biodiversity has been lost.

But it's not too late. EcoPeace / Friends of the Earth Middle East (FoEME) asks you to join us in calling for a return of water to this river, and a return of life to the Jordan Valley.



CROSSING THE JORDAN

In Jewish tradition the Jordan River serves as a place of connection. The power of God touches down here when the water retreats to allow the People of Israel to cross over and when Naaman, general of an enemy army, is cured of his physical afflictions and antipathy toward Israel. Elijah the Prophet boards a chariot of fire at the Jordan and soars to heavenly immortality. It is a significant crossing point where humans can be touched by divine power.

The banks of the Jordan have also inspired human connection and reconciliation. The very phrase “crossing the Jordan” signifies releasing the grievances and hindrances of the past in order to enter a new period of hope. After crossing the Jordan, Jacob reconciles with his brother Esau thereby ending the competition that defined their adult lives. Tradition teaches that Jacob and Esau were the ancestors of kingdoms on the west and east sides of the Jordan.

Vowing to survive through mutual, supportive co-dependence, two women from opposite sides cross the river together and flourish. The book of Ruth tells the inspiring story of how Ruth the Moabite and Naomi of Judah transform a situation of famine and loss into one of sustenance and rebirth. Navigating the Jordan together shows them that the tension between their countries need not impede a sustaining friendship.

Enmity melts, miracles occur, and new life begins at the Jordan.

Until about 50 years ago, the Jordan Valley looked much as it did in biblical times. From its source in the foothills of Mount Hermon, the river rushed down into Lake Kinneret, and then meandered more slowly along the length of the Jordan Valley until it disappeared into the intensely saline lake of the Dead Sea – the

lowest point on the surface of the earth. All along the way, the Jordan River brought life to the valley. It created wetland habitats in which wild plants and animals flourished. It greened a corridor through the desert, connecting the eco-systems of Eastern Africa and Western Asia and forming a flyway used by some 500 million migratory birds each year. And it allowed the flourishing of human life and the emergence of urban civilization.

Some of the first people ever to leave Africa walked across this plain and drank from its springs. And it was here, too, that men and women first began to plant and harvest grain in the alluvial mud north of the Dead Sea. Farming was the breakthrough that allowed villages to develop into the world’s earliest towns, Jericho among them. Jericho’s walls were built some 10,000 years ago, and it can claim to be the oldest continuously inhabited city anywhere in the world.



AN ECOSYSTEM DESTROYED

Neither the natural beauty nor the spiritual and historic significance of the Jordan has been enough to save the river from being degraded.

In just over 50 years, the countries that share this watershed have dammed and diverted more than 96% of the river's historic flow. What little water remains is polluted with saline, sewage, and agricultural run-off. In places - including the place where Elijah ascended to heaven on a chariot of fire- the river is not much more than a stagnant canal of effluent.

As the river has dried up, the Jordan Valley has suffered an ecological collapse. Half the valley's biodiversity has been lost. The Dead Sea, sustained only by inflowing water from the Jordan, is sinking by more than a meter every year.

This is not just a tragedy for wildlife. Springs that flowed for thousands of years have started to falter and fail. Wells that supported farms and families have run dry.

Our neglect of this river shows a disregard for the land of Israel and for the promise that it represents, for our own spiritual tradition, and for our moral responsibility as custodians of God's earth. It is a neglect that leaves us spiritually impoverished, and that carries real practical consequences - crippling the growth of an economy that could be supported by tourism and exacerbating the political conflicts that divide the region. The destruction of the Jordan has caused an ecological collapse whose severity and cost - economic, ecological, human - we are only now beginning to count.

Our neglect of this river shows a disregard for the land of Israel, for our own spiritual tradition, and for our moral responsibility as custodians of God's earth



THE DESTRUCTION OF THE JORDAN SOME FACTS AND FIGURES

- The Lower Jordan River begins at Lake Kinneret and flows south for about 120km before reaching its end at the Dead Sea.
- The Lower Jordan Valley is divided between Jordanians, Israelis, and Palestinians. Palestinians have no access to the Jordan and do not receive water directly from the river.
- Until about 1950, some 1.3 billion cubic meters of water flowed through the valley every year.
- 96% of that flow has been diverted.
- Untreated or poorly treated sewage has been dumped or allowed to leak into the river for over 50 years from Israeli, Jordanian, and Palestinian communities.
- The diversion and pollution of this water has caused an ecological collapse - more than 50% of the valley's biodiversity has been lost.
- The dying of the Jordan is also causing the Dead Sea to disappear - it is now sinking at the rate of approximately one meter per year.
- FoEME estimates that Israel diverts about half of the river's average annual flow, while Syria and Jordan take the rest.



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A FAILURE OF WISDOM

“We do not own nature...we are its stewards on behalf of God, who created and owns everything. As guardians of the earth, we are duty-bound to respect its integrity.”

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks

Why has this happened? How have we allowed this to happen to a place of such exceptional beauty and value?

At the root of the problem is conflict. The basin that drains into the Jordan River is divided between Lebanese, Syrians, Jordanians, Israelis, and Palestinians. Instead of seeing the valley as a single, trans-boundary watershed, these nations have raced to capture the greatest possible share of the Jordan’s water. FoEME estimates that Israel diverts about half of the river’s average annual flow, while Syria and Jordan take about a quarter each. Palestinians, denied access to the river, take almost nothing.

Given the intensity of political conflict in the region, this zero-sum struggle for the valley’s water might seem inevitable. But it is, in the long term, an approach that will undermine the interests of all concerned. This is a single watershed the flow of its water does not correspond to the borders drawn on our maps, and its rain and rivers cannot be sustainably managed through a process of competition.

The demise of the Jordan also reveals a profound failure of respect for the natural and non-human world. We behave as though creation, including its water and all its forms of life, were nothing more than a collection of resources to be mined for human use. This is surely not what was meant when God gave man dominion over the earth. As Avraham Kook, first Chief Rabbi of Israel, wrote – “There can be no doubt in the mind of any intelligent, thinking person that when the Torah instructs humankind to dominate – “And have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the sky, and over every living thing that moves upon the Earth” (Genesis 1:28) – it does not mean the domination of a harsh ruler, who afflicts his people and servants merely to fulfill his personal whim and desire, according to the crookedness of his heart.”

“We do not own nature...we are its stewards on behalf of God, who created and owns everything. As guardians of the earth, we are duty-bound to respect its integrity.”

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks

On the contrary, our special place in God’s creation carries with it a responsibility to cherish this earth. In Genesis the words used to describe this duty are le’ovdah and leshomrah – to ‘serve’ and to ‘guard’ the creation. As Rabbi Jonathan Sacks has written –

“This is perhaps the best short definition of humanity’s responsibility for nature as the Bible conceives it. We do not own nature – “The earth is the Lord’s and the fullness thereof.” (Psalms 24:1) We are its stewards on behalf of God, who created and owns everything. As guardians of the earth, we are duty-bound to respect its integrity.”

The lack of a sense of wonder, the loss of reverence for life, the abandonment of our responsibility as custodians – all of this has contributed to the destruction of the Jordan. The revival of the river, then, requires not just a shift in policy, but a renewed spiritual effort to honor the creation that God has entrusted to us.





A NEW VISION OF THE VALLEY

FoEME has a different vision for the Jordan Valley: a vision in which a clean, living river runs from Lake Kinneret to the Dead Sea; in which the valley's plants, birds and animals are afforded the water they need to flourish; in which the springs flow as they have for millennia; and in which the water extracted for human use is divided equitably between the nations that share this valley and amongst the people who live here.

This is a vision that reflects the image of the valley that we see in the Hebrew Bible. It is a vision that honors our moral responsibilities as Jews, that shows respect and love for the land of Israel, and that expresses reverence for God's creation.

Given the scarcity of water in parts of this region and the state of relations between the countries that share the valley, realizing this vision will not be easy. But difficulty cannot be an excuse for inaction. To do nothing is to leave a landscape irreparably damaged by our own neglect. That is the course we are now on.

The starting point of any new approach must be to see this river and its tributaries as a single, interconnected ecosystem. If we want the Jordan to survive – if we want to use this water to sustain farms and families and economies – we have no choice but to manage it sustainably through cross-border cooperation.



A MEASURE OF PROGRESS

In the last three years we have seen the first signs of progress in the effort to revive the river.

Responding to years of advocacy, national governments and municipalities are now working to prevent the dumping or leaking of untreated sewage into the river. New treatment plants are in development in Jordanian, Israeli, and Palestinian communities throughout the Jordan Valley. FoEME is confident that half a century of using the Jordan as a sewage canal could soon come to an end.

2013 also saw the first release of clean water into the Jordan River in 49 years. The Israeli Water Authority has agreed to allocate 30mcm (million cubic meters) of fresh water every year from Lake Kinneret to help revive the river. This sets an important precedent for future allocations, but it falls far short of FoEME's recommendation that a third of the historic flow be returned as part of an international effort to rehabilitate the Jordan.

FoEME is also developing the first cross-border master plan for the management of the Jordan River Valley – a plan that takes account of the valley's fragile ecology as well as recognizing the legitimate human need to draw on its water resources. The plan puts scientifically sound and economically realistic policy recommendations behind our vision for the Jordan. Key recommendations include the return of 400-600 mcm (million cubic meters) of fresh water to the river; an end to the dumping of raw or poorly-treated sewage, saline, and other effluents into the stream; and the establishment of functioning international mechanisms for the joint management of the valley's water.

With the support of national governments, this master plan can become the blueprint for the revival of the river.



JUSTICE, PEACE, PROSPERITY

We believe the Jordan can be revived without weakening the valley's agricultural economy or causing a shortage of water for human use. In the countries that share the valley, FoEME has identified over a billion cubic meters of water that could be saved (see the fact box below) and used to restore basic water rights to the Palestinians, to revive the Lower Jordan River, and to save the Dead Sea.

In the past decade FoEME has opened eco-parks – ideal places to stay and learn - on both sides of the Jordan. We are now working towards the creation of a trans-boundary ecological peace park centered on one of the river's historic crossing points, on the border between Israel and Jordan. The peace park will welcome visitors from both sides of the valley, providing a much-needed point of access to a river that, for much of its length, remains a closed military zone.

FoEME believes that a living Jordan River can bring economic prosperity as well as ecological health to this valley, and that the management of the valley's water provides a practical opportunity for regional cooperation and the advancement of justice and peace.



REVIVING THE JORDAN

- FoEME recommends the release of 400-600 million cubic meters (mcm) of fresh water into the river every year.
- In addition, the Jordan needs to flood at least once each year in order to keep the river's ecosystem healthy (100m³/sec for 24 hours).
- FoEME recommends that Israel release 220mcm of water into the river each year, Syria 100mcm, and Jordan 90mcm. FoEME also recognizes that Palestine, as a riparian to the river, has a right to a fair share of the Jordan's water.
- FoEME's analysis has identified over a billion cubic meters of water that could be saved by these countries (primarily through reduction of leaks, improvements to irrigation efficiency, water harvesting and grey-water recycling, and demand management) and used to revive the river and to restore Palestinian water rights.
- The revival of the river requires that Jordanian, Israeli, and Palestinian decision-makers implement national policy strategies to manage their own demand for water, and to cooperate in the implementation of a comprehensive trans-boundary master plan for the river.
- This master plan should determine levels of water flow, set water quality standards, identify ways to eliminate pollution, define ecological corridors, support environmental rehabilitation programs, and advance plans for the development of eco-tourism in the Jordan Valley.
- Implementation of a master plan requires the establishment of a functioning trans-boundary commission to manage the valley's water resources, resolve disputes, and strengthen the mechanisms of cooperation.



II. SOURCES OF INSPIRATION

PROTECTORS OF CREATION: JUDAISM AND THE STATE OF THE JORDAN RIVER

Rabbi David Saperstein

David Saperstein has been a prominent writer and speaker on issues of faith and social justice for more than 30 years. He is the Director of the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism (RAC) in Washington DC.

Water is a central issue of a diverse set of problems that we face today. Climate change's most devastating disruptions will result from changes in water sources and the water cycle: ice caps melting, more severe and more frequent storms, floods, changes in oceanic ecosystems and desertification that threaten suffering, forced migration and destabilization. This is doubly true for Israel whose long-term security and survival hinges on access to sustainable and reliable water resources, including the Jordan River.

The work of EcoPeace / Friends of the Earth Middle East (including the recent report 'Take me over the Jordan') gives a summary of the history of the Jordan River and the danger it faces from climate change and the growing water demand from Israel, Palestine, Jordan and Syria. Damming and diversion have reduced the amount of water flowing through the Lower Jordan River Valley to only 4%(!) of what flowed 50 years ago. Coupled with discharges of untreated municipal wastewater and other pollution, the Jordan River is no longer able to sustain the robust ecosystems of its past; some native animal populations are facing extinction, while other invasive species take their place. Without significant efforts and cooperation between the stakeholders in the region, the Jordan River may dry out and become a dangerously destabilizing force threatening the security of every nation in the region and undermining any realistic prospect for a viable peace process.

"Without significant efforts and cooperation...the Jordan River may dry out and become a dangerously destabilizing force, threatening the security of every nation in the region and undermining prospects for a viable peace"

Self-interest and biblical mandate converge. As Reform Jews, we see clearly that our traditions mandate us to be **shomrei adamah**, protectors of God's creation and as with all of **k'lal Yisrael**, Israel's security and well being are key foci of our policy agendas. Both argue for us to engage strongly with efforts to solve these environmental challenges. While climate change has the potential to escalate existing conflicts, it also provides an opportunity for regional collaboration and cooperation to address this mutual threat, and thus build relations of trust in working to secure their common environmental well-being, contributing to a lasting peace.

"As Jews, we see clearly that our traditions mandate us to be shomrei adamah, protectors of God's creation"

EcoPeace / Friends of the Earth Middle East's campaign to rehabilitate the Jordan River presents a vital starting point for a rigorous debate about water usage and environmental preservation in a region of volatile politics and fragile ecosystems. The next few years will be critical to shaping the future of the State of Israel and the region, and this campaign makes a significant contribution to a holistic solution toward a hopeful future for all.

WATER AND THE JORDAN RIVER: APPRECIATING A LIMITED RESOURCE Rabbi Yonatan Neril

Yonatan Neril founded and directs The Interfaith Center for Sustainable Development (www.interfaithsustain.com) in Jerusalem. He holds a BA and MA at Stanford with a focus on global environmental issues.

This article was adapted by the author based on material produced as part of the Jewcology project. Jewcology.com is a new web portal for the global Jewish environmental community. Thanks to the ROI community for their generous support, which made the Jewcology project possible.

In recent decades, the Jordan River has declined precipitously. From a Jewish perspective, the significance of the Jordan River becomes readily apparent from the numerous references to it in the Tanach (Hebrew Bible). The physical state of the Jordan River points to a deeper spiritual challenge facing Israel's inhabitants as well as all of humanity: how do we live as spiritual beings in a physical existence?

Human beings depend on a sufficient supply of high quality fresh water for their survival. Because of this essential dependence, Jewish sources equate water with life². By recognizing our dependence on water, and ultimately our dependence on G-d, we can strengthen our appreciation and protection of our precious natural resources, and our relationship with the Creator of the world.

This article will begin by exploring the Jewish teachings on the Jordan River, continue with a look at water more generally in Jewish sources, and conclude with a look at water issues and the Jordan River in contemporary times.

THE JORDAN RIVER IN THE BIBLE

The first of many references to the Jordan River in the Tanach can be found in the Book of Genesis, in which the Jordan River is compared to "the garden of God" after Abraham's nephew Lot saw that the Jordan valley was "completely watered"³. Later in Genesis, the patriarch Jacob is described as crossing the Jordan River⁴. The Oral tradition teaches that Jacob placed his staff into the Jordan River and the river split⁵. Following the Exodus from Egypt, the second covenant between God and the Israelites was given while the Israelites were encamped near the Jordan River⁶. This is the location where Moses gave his speech that is the book of Deuteronomy. In the Book of Joshua, two and a half of the Israelite tribes settled east of the Jordan River and built a large altar on its banks as "a witness" between them and the other tribes⁷.

Furthermore, in Biblical history, the Jordan appears as the scene of several miracles – the first taking place when the Israelites crossed the Jordan under Joshua and the river split⁸. In a different instance, two prophets, Elijah and Elisha, split the Jordan River and walked across on dry

ground⁹. Similarly, Elisha performed two other miracles at the Jordan: he healed Naaman by having him bathe in its waters, and he made the axe head of one of the "children of the prophets" float, by throwing a piece of wood into the water¹⁰.

WATER AND THE JEWS IN THE DESERT AND THE LAND OF ISRAEL

Even before the Israelites entered the land of Israel, water was central to their collective experience. In the desert, uncertainty about water resources inspired numerous complaints and lessons for the wandering Jews¹¹. The Talmud teaches that in the merit of Miriam's song, a well appeared in the desert which accompanied the Jews wherever they went.¹² G-d gave us this essential resource, without which we could not live for more than a few days, in the water-scarce desert. But the long-term security of the resource was never certain.

The Biblical experiences with water in the desert can be understood as a spiritual training to cultivate appreciation for G-d's goodness. Through the process of taking water for granted, losing it and then receiving it directly from G-d, the desert wanderers certainly appreciated water and the One Who provided

it. The Prophet Jeremiah refers to G-d as the 'Source of Living Waters,'¹³ since water is one of the chief means by which G-d provides life to people. Thus, at the end of the Jews' desert experience, they sang an exultant song about their appreciation to God for water.¹⁴

Upon entering Israel, the experience of water scarcity continued for our ancestors, living in an agrarian society whose bounty or famine was regulated by rain. Israel is a semi-arid country with no significant rivers other than the Jordan. It receives modest rainfall, averaging less than 100 millimeters per year in the extreme south to 1,128 millimeters in the north.¹⁵ (By comparison, New York City averages between 710 and 1140 millimeters of precipitation per year.¹⁶) Until the 20th century, most agriculture in Israel was rain-fed and not irrigated; farmers depended on the winter rains in order to eat and live. Our sources¹⁷ teach that this water insecurity is by Divine design, to help us realize that G-d is the ultimate Provider not only of water, but all our needs.¹⁸ Jewish prayers and texts reinforce this message and remind us of what our ancestors knew about water. Our prayers and texts are replete with appreciation for rain, profound recognition of the importance of water, prayers imploring

² Avot of Rabbi Natan 34:10. This introduction is based on Dr. Akiva Wolff's "Water: A Sukkos Drash"

³ Genesis 13:10

⁴ Genesis 32:11

⁵ Midrash Tanchuma Buber, Vayetze 3; Aggadath Bereishith 45:2

⁶ Numbers 35:1

⁷ Joshua 22:10, 22:26

⁸ Joshua 3:15-17

⁹ II Kings 2:8, 2:14

¹⁰ II Kings 5:14, 6:6

¹¹ See, for example, Numbers 20:3

¹² Midrash Tanchuma Bamidbar 2 and Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Ta'anit 9a. When Miriam dies, the well goes away (see Numbers 20:1-2)

¹³ Jeremiah 2:12, 17:13

¹⁴ Numbers 21:17

¹⁵ "Climate: Israel". U.S. Library of Congress, online at <http://countrystudies.us/israel/36.htm>

¹⁶ Normals & Extremes, Central Park, New York, 1869 to Present, National Weather Service Forecast Office, 01 April 2006.

¹⁷ For example, Rabbi Alex Israel teaches regarding rain in the Land of Israel: "The dependency of the mountain-land makes it a difficult place to live. Throughout the book of Genesis we read of periodic famine in Canaan. Israel is destined to live a life of dependency on God. This is Israel's legacy, its historic challenge. The land of Israel is naturally insecure and that is precisely the reason that it was destined for Israel." Commentary to Parshat Eikev, 5766, originally posted on website of Midreshet Lindenbaum, Jerusalem.

¹⁸ The Talmud teaches that G-d directly waters the land of Israel and the rest of the world is watered by a messenger, as Job 5:10 says. Babylonian Talmud, Taanit 10a. Thus when rain is withheld in Israel, it is because of Divine intervention in response to Israel's actions, as the second paragraph of Shema makes clear.

G-d to provide us with water, and gratitude for the rains when they come. For example, Dr. Jeremy Benstein notes that Biblical Hebrew contains at least six different words to describe liquid precipitation (geshem, matar, yoreh, malkosh, revivim, se'irim), which denote different times and intensities of rainfall.¹⁹ **Yoreh** refers to the early rains of October, and malkosh refers to the late rains of April.

Furthermore, the Talmud records: "Rav Judah said in the name of Rav: 'We give thanks to You, Hashem, our G-d for every single drop which you have caused to fall upon us.'" ²⁰ This is said at the beginning of each fall rainy season. And the Talmud teaches, "The day when rain falls is as great as the day on which heaven and earth were created."²¹ Kabbalistically, water symbolizes consciousness,²² and is thus an appropriate means through which we cultivate our awareness of G-d. Praying for rain helps develop our relationship with our Creator by reminding us that G-d provides us water – along with everything else we need – each day.

WATER IN CONTEMPORARY TIMES

Today, the industrialization of water distribution has increased the availability of water yet reduced our appreciation of its importance. We generally do not see where food is grown or the rain or irrigation that waters the crops. In Israel, for example, the National Water Carrier distributing water from the Kinneret (Sea of Galilee) and electric pumping of the underground aquifers has enabled irrigation of most Israeli farmland, increasing crop yields. Most recently, desalinization of Mediterranean seawater is becoming an increasing source of freshwater to fulfill increasing demand

and to make up for expected future decrease supply from these other sources. (However, desalinization requires a significant amount of energy to produce the water.) Throughout the world, irrigation through electric pumping of water has transformed crop production. For households, piped water now comes directly to us, replacing reliance on local water sources.

These innovations have relieved us from transporting water from streams and cisterns to our homes. While this represents a tremendous improvement in quality of life, it also blinds us to where water comes from – both physically and spiritually. With this, we have lost the deep-seated experience of the preciousness of water. For many, this is partly a spiritual loss: lacking the sense of our ultimate dependence on G-d for all our needs. But it also has very significant practical impacts, because where appreciation ends, misuse begins.

The world increasingly faces a water crisis, experienced most by those in Africa, South Asia, and China. A lack of sufficient drinking water is recognized to be a leading cause of death in the world. Some 884 million people in the world do not have access to safe drinking-water sources.²³ The United Nations Environment Program notes that two-thirds of the world's population is likely to face water stress by 2025, a result of "climate change, uncontrolled urbanization, unplanned water withdrawal and inappropriate water policies."²⁴

In the Land of Israel, Israel's main aquifers and the Sea of Galilee have dipped below their red lines in recent years, endangering water quality.²⁵ This has been due to increasing demand and overall reduced rainfall. The Israeli Ministry of the Environment has warned that "Preservation

of the country's scant water sources may be the greatest challenge facing Israel today."²⁶

THE CASE OF THE LOWER JORDAN RIVER

The Jordan River is a geological and cultural landmark, sustaining diverse vegetation and fauna. The river once supplied Israel and its neighbors with part of their water needs, including for industry, agriculture, and domestic consumption. Pollution, overuse, and inappropriate development, however, have damaged the river's ecosystem and have endangered a clean water supply for both the Jordan valley and the highlands.

A report developed through a collaboration between the French Regional Mission for Water and Agriculture of the French Embassy in Jordan (MREA) and the International Water Management Institute (IWMI) describes the striking transformation of the Jordan River Basin and the Lower Jordan River (south of the Sea of Galilee). According to the report, in 1950, only 10,000 hectares were irrigated, groundwater was untapped and abundant water flowed to the Dead Sea – whereas currently, 46,000 hectares are irrigated, groundwater is being severely mined, and nearly all surface resources are tapped.

Consequently and mainly because of an overdraft of the aquifers and competition for water, water use became unsustainable; and at present, while around 2,700 Mm³/yr of surface water and rainfall water enter the River Jordan basin on average, only 200 Mm³/yr reach the Dead Sea.²⁷ The Lower Jordan now survives as a river in good part due to the inflow of raw sewage.

CONCLUSION

Piped water and irrigated fields give us the misimpression that the availability of fresh water is virtually limitless. Yet freshwater is scarce on planet earth.²⁸ And these technologies obscure how water is becoming even more limited due to a plethora of factors, among them increasing demand, climate change, and pollution of freshwater supplies. Can human society simultaneously enjoy pumped and piped water and use it wisely?

Developing a deeper water awareness is crucial to ensure our long-term access to water, and to rehabilitate the Lower Jordan River. That is where the teachings of our 3000-year old tradition come in. These teachings on rain, water, and the Jordan can help us cultivate an appreciation for water, and inspire us to value and protect the water resources with which we are blessed.

¹⁹ "Forgotten Language of Rain," Jerusalem Report, Fall 2005. Moses uses four of the words in one verse of Torah (Deuteronomy 32:2)

²⁰ Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Ta'anit, p. 6b

²¹ Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Ta'anit 7b, Artscroll translation.

²² See, for example, Sefer Yetzira.

²³ The 2010 Report of the World Health Organization/UNICEF Joint Monitoring Programme for Water Supply and Sanitation, available online at http://www.wssinfo.org/download.php?id_document=1289

²⁴ "Note of the Executive Director," 2003, available online at www.unep.org/GC/GC22/Document/K0263442.doc

²⁵ Summer 2008, from Israeli Ministry of the Environment, www.environment.gov.il and Adam Teva v'Din, www.adamteva.org.il

²⁶ Israeli Ministry of the Environment, "The Environment in Israel," 2002, p. 73

²⁷ Courcier, R.; Venot, J. P.; Molle, F., "Historical transformations of the lower Jordan river basin (in Jordan): Changes in water use and projections (1950-2025)". Comprehensive Assessment Research Report 9. Colombo, Sri Lanka: Comprehensive Assessment Secretariat. Available online at: http://www.iwmi.cgiar.org/Assessment/files_new/publications/CA%20Research%20Reports/ColouredCARR9.pdf.

²⁸ The Science Advisory Board of Canfei Nesharim write: "Although water is seemingly abundant, the amount of fresh water is not. 97.5% of all water on Earth is salt water, leaving only 2.5% as fresh water. Nearly 70% of that fresh water is frozen in the icecaps of Antarctica and Greenland; most of the remainder is present as soil moisture, or lies in deep underground aquifers as groundwater not accessible to human use. Less than 1% of the world's fresh water (~0.007% of all water on earth) is accessible for direct human uses. This is the water found in lakes, rivers, reservoirs and those underground sources that are shallow enough to be tapped at an affordable cost. Only this amount is regularly renewed by rain and snowfall and is therefore available on a sustainable basis. Water, however, is not equally distributed. Of the very small amount of water that is usable by humans, approximately 20% is in the Great Lakes of North America (equal to 84% of all surface freshwater in the US, with another 20% in the Russian Lake Baikal."

WITH MY STAFF ALONE – A (HI)STORY OF TRANSFORMATION

Rabbi Ayala Miron

Ayala Miron is the founding Rabbi of congregation Bavat Ayin in Rosh Ha'ayin, Israel, striving for over a decade to create and enhance authentic Jewish liberal life in Israel.

In preparation for his second crossing of the Jordan River, Jacob is overwhelmed with both gratitude and fear:

“With my staff alone I crossed this Jordan, and now I have become two camps. Save me, I pray”, he pleads²⁹.

Crossing the river at seventeen, followed by a flock of angels, he had to quickly shed his being “a quiet man, dwelling in tents”³⁰, depending on his mother’s guidance, and establish himself as an experienced traveler. After twenty years in exile he comes back – with a full camp of four wives, thirteen children and herds. Before crossing back he has to go through three confrontations: with his deceiving uncle and father-in-law, with his deceived brother Esau and with the angel of God, or rather with his higher (and deeper) self. Crossing the river means leaping into a new stage in Jacob’s spiritual life: leaving his evasive nature to develop the courage to confront – to stand face to face against danger, against injustice, against his innermost feelings. It means becoming Yisra’el- the one who struggles- rather than Ya’akov, the follower.

Crossing the Jordan thus represents transformation.

Transformation requires leaving something meaningful behind, making a sacrifice.

This might be the reason why Moses, who was loved and highly appreciated by God, was not allowed to cross the river and enter the land of Kna’an, despite his recurring pleas. In order for the children of Israel to go through the transforming passage from dependence to responsibility they had to leave Moses – representing the desert phase – behind. They had to cross the river without his guidance, to start a new era of taking responsibility over their lives as a nation defined by geographical borders.

Another crossing that marks a double transformation happens in the parting scene of the prophet Elijah from his disciple Elisha, taking place on the bank of the Jordan River. God’s reaction to Elijah’s zealous massacre of the Ba’al prophets hints to his nearing end, as God orders him to anoint his successor, the time had come for him to leave. Elijah crosses the river, walking and talking to Elisha, when he is suddenly taken by a fiery chariot going up to heaven in a whirlwind. This mysterious disappearance allowed tradition to transform the uncompromising zealous prophet to an appeased peacemaking old man who visits families on the Passover night Seder to

transform and turn back the heart of parents to their children and the heart of children to their parents, as the prophet Malachi prophesizes in the concluding verses of the prophet section of the Bible³¹. Elijah’s sudden desertion gives way to his successor, Elisha, to start his service as God’s messenger, a journey that begins by crossing the Jordan River back on his way to Jericho: the crossing of the river has also transformed Elisha.

Both stories actualize an interesting principle that we can also find in the larger story of the journey of the children of Israel, crossing back to their homeland, as well as in the private story of Naomi, making her way back to Bethlehem from Moab in the Ruth scroll. Unlike the Rubicon or the Red sea, the crossing of the Jordan River is reversible - it allows people to go back and forth between the land of Kna’an on their life’s journeys.

Crossing the Jordan River thus also means, there’s always a chance of re-evaluating our way back. It does not mean we are going back in time to where we were when we first crossed. It means we are ready for another stage, it means we are ready to make another important and meaningful sacrifice.

I believe the current situation of the Jordan River calls upon the two notions that are so closely connected to the story and the history of the river: transformation and sacrifice.

I believe that following more than six decades of Israel’s independence we Israelis are now ready to go beyond the survival mode that had been justifiably our dominant mode of being and acting

for the first decades. I think we are ready to broaden our horizons, to go beyond our primary fear of expulsion, beyond our exile mentality.

After more than six decades I think we are ready to re-evaluate and transform our way of relating to the land, going beyond short term gain – as the re-flooding of the Hula valley in the recent years have proven.

I believe that the Jordan River is our next target for a transformation that requires both a shift in the way of thinking and a sacrifice. I think we are now ready for the sacrifice that is needed to bring forth both spiritual and ecological qualities of our main, and practically our only, river.

I also believe that the Israeli Reform Movement should and can be a major player in the struggle for reviving the Jordan River, a struggle that combines a plea for justice, education and transformation. As Reform Jews we strive to integrate a vision both planted deep in our tradition and our resources as well as looking directly into the present and courageously unto the future.

May we all be inspired by Jacob’s prayer preceding his crossing the River:

“With my staff alone I crossed this Jordan... Save me, I pray.”

May we, like Jacob, be accompanied by a flock of angels while striving to fulfill this sacred mission of saving the river, saving our own future.

²⁹ Genesis 32:10-11

³⁰ Genesis 25:27

³¹ Mal’achi 3:24

CROSSING THE JORDAN RIVER

Rabbi Natan Levy

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The other side of the Jordan is accident prone. For what else can we make of the odd fact that of the six cities of refuge - those 'Ir Miklat' where negligent manslaughters might flee to safety from the relatives of the slain victims, who could elsewhere hunt them down and kill them - of those six cities, three were located on the other-what we moderns would call the Jordanian side of the Jordan river. Half of the cities of refuge erected for a less than a fifth of the population? On the other side of the Jordan only the tribes of Rueben, Gad and a half-portion of Manasseh decided to dwell. According to the final census taken in the 40th year of desert wandering before the conquest of Israel, that amounted to 110,550 men from the ages of 20 and upwards. Why would 110,550 men from a total of over 600,000 males of Israel require half of the cities of refuge? What is wrong with the far side of the Jordan that made accidents there so much more commonplace, and thus necessitated so many more cities of refuge per capita?

Perhaps it is a matter of geography. Chief Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks speaks of the contours of the land of Israel as a moral teacher. There are just two large lakes in Israel, he points out, the Kinneret and the Yam Ha'Melach, the Salty or Dead Sea. The Kinneret is alive with flora and fauna teeming at its banks and below its surface. The Dead Sea is literally dead of all nearly every organism. The difference is simple. The Kinneret both receives and gives of its

waters. The Dead Sea only extracts an inflow, and does not give out. That is the simple moral lesson we learn from the ecology of Israel: In order to live, one must give of oneself.

And the Jordan River was the tangible conduit of that giving gesture. Its flow was the move from interiority to exteriority. Perhaps this is why the outrageous responsibility the Torah demands of Israel, a responsibility to bear the brunt of another's hidden faults, only applies—according to the Talmudic sages - once Israel 'crosses over the Jordan river.' (Talmud Sanhadrin 43b) When the Jordan is the living metaphor par excellence for the need to flow towards the 'other', then this rabbinical dictum is not a quasi-mystical transformation of responsibility upon the backs of Israel, but a simple recognition. As the people stepped into the flow of the Jordan River, there was no freeing baptism, but rather a strapping on of the immense frailties of every other crosser. We share the burden of the stranger, as we emerge dripping from the banks. For just as the Jordan River gave and gave again, so must we.

Those two and one-half tribes who never crossed over that river, or rather, stopped their journey at the threshold of that shared burden of responsibility, perhaps left themselves just a hairs-breadth more susceptible to negligent murder. Just a touch more in need of another city of refuge. For what is manslaughter other than a dis-attention to the external world and

the others who inhabit it? What is manslaughter but the innocuous decision to quickly cut my own kindling wood above the need to check the axe-head one last time so that it does not fly off to kill the passer-by? Without the lesson of wading through the Jordan, of feeling the flow of responsibility - bracingly cold against the face and body - incidents against the other, those small insensitivities towards the external, can multiply onto death.

Lest we think that the cities of refuge represent some vestige of the archaic past. Consider the words of Emanuel Levinas, the modern French moral philosopher: "Do not these murders, committed without the murderer's volition, occur in other ways than by the axe-head leaving the handle and coming to strike the passer-by? In Western Society - free and civilized, but without social equality and a rigorous social justice - is it absurd to wonder whether the advantages available to the rich in relation to the poor...whether these advantages, one thing leading to another, are not the cause somewhere, of someone's agony? Are there not, somewhere in the world wars and carnage which result from these advantages?...Does not all this make our cities cities of refuge or cities of exile?" (Beyond the Verse, p. 40).

It is a damning claim. That we, Westerners, live good lives, whilst and perhaps even because, others are suffering. Might we even turn Levinas' conception into an environmental clarion call. We, who have become needy takers from the earth and its fullness, despite our good intentions, are we not depriving others further downstream from us of the shared benefit of those resources we enjoy with relative ease? Is this not another

reason then, why crossing the Jordan was the fulcrum act of Israel realizing its potential. That in crossing, one remembers not just an upstream lake that gave, but must recall that there is also a downstream, in which the ripples we form are multiplied. The waste we pour into today's river, becomes the washing and drinking for the downstream dwellers by tomorrow.

Once, the Jordan River guarded Israel from this type of negligence, this rationalized greed. Now that its tributaries are polluted, its waters siphoned off for irrigation intensive agriculture, its fish dead, now that only a thin brown gurgle of pesticide run-off will ever reach the desert, what now can we bath in, in order to remember our responsibility? What now can we cross over that will awaken ourselves to the geography of the caring deed and the downstream gesture? What now will save us from living in cities of manslaughter and negligence?

FROM THE TANAKH ³²

'...THE WHOLE PLAIN OF THE JORDAN...'

Abram said to Lot, "Let there be no strife between you and me, between my herdsmen and yours, for we are kinsmen.

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 looked about him and saw how well watered was the whole plain of the Jordan, all of it -- this was before the LORD had destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah -- all the way to Zoar, like the garden of the LORD, like the land of Egypt.

So Lot chose for himself the whole plain of the Jordan, and Lot journeyed eastward. Thus they parted from each other;

Abram remained in the land of Canaan, while Lot settled in the cities of the Plain, pitching his tents near Sodom.

Genesis 13:8-12

'...WITH MY STAFF ALONE I CROSSED THIS JORDAN...'

Then Jacob said, "O God of my father Abraham and God of my father Isaac, O LORD, who said to me, 'Return to your native land and I will deal bountifully with you'!

I am unworthy of all the kindness that You have so steadfastly shown Your servant: with my staff alone I crossed this Jordan, and now I have become two camps.

Genesis 32:10-11

'...ALL ISRAEL CROSSED ON DRY LAND...'

Early next morning, Joshua and all the Israelites set out from Shittim and marched to the Jordan. They did not cross immediately, but spent the night there.

Three days later, the officials went through the camp and charged the people as follows: "When you see the Ark of the Covenant of the LORD your God being borne by the levitical priests, you shall move forward. Follow it -- but keep a distance of some two thousand cubits from it, never coming any closer to it -- so that you may know by what route to march, since it is a road you have not traveled before."

And Joshua said to the people, "Purify yourselves, for tomorrow the LORD will perform wonders in your midst."

Then Joshua ordered the priests, "Take up the Ark of the Covenant and advance to the head of the people." And they took up the Ark of the Covenant and marched at the head of the people.

The LORD said to Joshua, "This day, for the first time, I will exalt you in the sight of all Israel, so that they shall know that I will be with you as I was with Moses.

For your part, command the priests who carry the Ark of the Covenant as follows: When you

³² For analysis on the meaning and modern-day relevance of texts from the Tanakh, see Rachel Havrelock, *River Jordan: The Mythology of a Dividing Line* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011).

reach the edge of the waters of the Jordan, make a halt in the Jordan."

And Joshua said to the Israelites, "Come closer and listen to the words of the LORD your God.

By this," Joshua continued, "you shall know that a living God is among you, and that He will dispossess for you the Canaanites, Hittites, Hivites, Perizzites, Girgashites, Amorites, and Jebusites: the Ark of the Covenant of the Sovereign of all the earth is advancing before you into the Jordan.

Now select twelve men from the tribes of Israel, one man from each tribe.

When the feet of the priests bearing the Ark of the LORD, the Sovereign of all the earth, come to rest in the waters of the Jordan, the waters of the Jordan -- the water coming from upstream -- will be cut off and will stand in a single heap."

When the people set out from their encampment to cross the Jordan, the priests bearing the Ark of the Covenant were at the head of the people.

Now the Jordan keeps flowing over its entire bed throughout the harvest season. But as soon as the bearers of the Ark reached the Jordan, and the feet of the priests bearing the Ark dipped into the water at its edge, the waters coming down from upstream piled up in a single heap a great way off, at Adam, the town next to Zarethan; and those flowing away downstream to the Sea of the Arabah (the Dead Sea) ran out completely. So the people crossed near Jericho.

The priests who bore the Ark of the LORD's Covenant stood on dry land exactly in the middle

of the Jordan, while all Israel crossed over on dry land, until the entire nation had finished crossing the Jordan.

Joshua 3

'WHEN THEY CAME TO THE REGION OF THE JORDAN...'

When they came to the region of the Jordan in the land of Canaan, the Reubenites and the Gadites and the half-tribe of Manasseh built an altar there by the Jordan, a great conspicuous altar.

A report reached the Israelites: "The Reubenites, the Gadites, and the half-tribe of Manasseh have built an altar opposite the land of Canaan, in the region of the Jordan, across from the Israelites."

Joshua 22:10-11

'WHAT ALARMED YOU...JORDAN, THAT YOU RAN BACKWARD'

When Israel went forth from Egypt, the house of Jacob from a people of strange speech, Judah became His holy one, Israel, His dominion.

The sea saw them and fled, Jordan ran backward, mountains skipped like rams, hills like sheep.

What alarmed you, O sea, that you fled, Jordan, that you ran backward, mountains, that you skipped like rams, hills, like sheep?

Tremble, O earth, at the presence of the LORD, at the presence of the God of Jacob, who turned the rock into a pool of water, the flinty rock into a fountain.

Psalms 114

'THE WATER HAS REMAINED WHOLESOME TO THIS DAY...'

When the LORD was about to take Elijah up to heaven in a whirlwind, Elijah and Elisha had set out from Gilgal.

Elijah said to Elisha, "Stay here, for the LORD has sent me on to Bethel." "As the LORD lives and as you live," said Elisha, "I will not leave you." So they went down to Bethel.

Disciples of the prophets at Bethel came out to Elisha and said to him, "Do you know that the LORD will take your master away from you today?" He replied, "I know it, too; be silent."

Then Elijah said to him, "Elisha, stay here, for the LORD has sent me on to Jericho." "As the LORD lives and as you live," said Elisha, "I will not leave you." So they went on to Jericho.

The disciples of the prophets who were at Jericho came over to Elisha and said to him, "Do you know that the LORD will take your master away from you today?" He replied, "I know it, too; be silent."

Elijah said to him, "Stay here, for the LORD has sent me on to the Jordan." "As the LORD lives and as you live, I will not leave you," he said, and the two of them went on.

Fifty men of the disciples of the prophets followed and stood by at a distance from them as the two of them stopped at the Jordan.

Thereupon Elijah took his mantle and, rolling it up, he struck the water; it divided to the right and left, so that the two of them crossed over on dry land.

As they were crossing, Elijah said to Elisha, "Tell me, what can I do for you before I am taken from you?" Elisha answered, "Let a double portion of your spirit pass on to me."

"You have asked a difficult thing," he said. "If you see me as I am being taken from you, this will be granted to you; if not, it will not."

As they kept on walking and talking, a fiery chariot with fiery horses suddenly appeared and separated one from the other; and Elijah went up to heaven in a whirlwind.

Elisha saw it, and he cried out, "Oh, father, father! Israel's chariots and horsemen!" When he could no longer see him, he grasped his garments and rent them in two. He picked up Elijah's mantle, which had dropped from him; and he went back and stood on the bank of the Jordan.

Taking the mantle which had dropped from Elijah, he struck the water and said, "Where is the LORD, the God of Elijah?" As he too struck the water, it parted to the right and to the left, and Elisha crossed over.

When the disciples of the prophets at Jericho saw him from a distance, they exclaimed, "The spirit of Elijah has settled on Elisha!" And they went to meet him and bowed low before him to the ground.

They said to him, "Your servants have fifty able men with them. Let them go and look for your master; perhaps the spirit of the LORD has carried him off and cast him upon some mountain or into some valley." "Do not send them," he replied.

But they kept pressing him for a long time, until he said, "Send them." So they sent out fifty men, who searched for three days but did not find him.

They came back to him while he was still in Jericho; and he said to them, "I told you not to go."

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!"

The water has remained wholesome to this day, in accordance with the word spoken by Elisha.

2 Kings 2:1-22

'GO AND BATHE SEVEN TIMES IN THE JORDAN...'

Naaman, commander of the army of the king of Aram, was important to his lord and high in his favor, for through him the LORD had granted victory to Aram. But the man, though a great warrior, was a leper.

Once, when the Arameans were out raiding, they carried off a young girl from the land of Israel, and she became an attendant to Naaman's wife.

She said to her mistress, "I wish Master could come before the prophet in Samaria; he would cure him of his leprosy."

[Naaman] went and told his lord just what the girl from the land of Israel had said.

And the king of Aram said, "Go to the king of Israel, and I will send along a letter." He set out, taking with him ten talents of silver, six thousand shekels of gold, and ten changes of clothing.

He brought the letter to the king of Israel. It read: "Now, when this letter reaches you, know that I have sent my courtier Naaman to you, that

you may cure him of his leprosy."

When the king of Israel read the letter, he rent his clothes and cried, "Am I God, to deal death or give life, that this fellow writes to me to cure a man of leprosy? Just see for yourselves that he is seeking a pretext against me!"

When Elisha, the man of God, heard that the king of Israel had rent his clothes, he sent a message to the king: "Why have you rent your clothes? Let him come to me, and he will learn that there is a prophet in Israel."

So Naaman came with his horses and chariots and halted at the door of Elisha's house.

Elisha sent a messenger to say to him, "Go and bathe seven times in the Jordan, and your flesh shall be restored and you shall be clean."

But Naaman was angered and walked away. "I thought," he said, "he would surely come out to me, and would stand and invoke the LORD his God by name, and would wave his hand toward the spot, and cure the affected part.

Are not the Amanah and the Pharpar, the rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? I could bathe in them and be clean!" And he stalked off in a rage.

But his servants came forward and spoke to him. "Sir," they said, "if the prophet told you to do something difficult, would you not do it? How much more when he has only said to you, 'Bathe and be clean.'"

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.

Returning with his entire retinue to the man of God, he stood before him and exclaimed, "Now

I know that there is no God in the whole world except in Israel! So please accept a gift from your servant.”

But he replied, “As the LORD lives, whom I serve, I will not accept anything.” He pressed him to accept, but he refused.

And Naaman said, “Then at least let your servant be given two mule-loads of earth; for your servant will never again offer up burnt offering or sacrifice to any god, except the LORD.

But may the LORD pardon your servant for this: When my master enters the temple of Rimmon to bow low in worship there, and he is leaning on my arm so that I must bow low in the temple of Rimmon -- when I bow low in the temple of Rimmon, may the LORD pardon your servant in this.”

And he said to him, “Go in peace.”
2 Kings, 5

‘LET US GO TO THE JORDAN...’

The disciples of the prophets said to Elisha, “See, the place where we live under your direction is too cramped for us.

Let us go to the Jordan, and let us each get a log there and build quarters there for ourselves to live in.” “Do so,” he replied.

Then one of them said, “Will you please come along with your servants?” “Yes, I will come,” he said; and he accompanied them. So they went to the Jordan and cut timber.

As one of them was felling a trunk, the iron ax head fell into the water. And he cried aloud, “Alas, master, it was a borrowed one!”

“Where did it fall?” asked the man of God. He showed him the spot; and he cut off a stick and threw it in, and he made the ax head float.

“Pick it up,” he said; so he reached out and took it.
2 Kings 6:1-7

‘A LAND OF WITH STREAMS AND SPRINGS...’

For the LORD your God is bringing you into a good land, a land with streams and springs and fountains issuing from plain and hill;

a land of wheat and barley, of vines, figs, and pomegranates, a land of olive trees and honey;

a land where you may eat food without stint, where you will lack nothing; a land whose rocks are iron and from whose hills you can mine copper.

When you have eaten your fill, give thanks to the LORD your God for the good land which He has given you.

Take care lest you forget the LORD your God and fail to keep His commandments, His rules, and His laws, which I enjoin upon you today.
Deuteronomy 8:7-11

TALMUD AND MIDRASH

ON THE WATERS OF THE JORDAN...

Rabbi Judah bar Simon in the name of Rabbi Yohanan: In the Torah, in the Prophets, and in the Writings we find proof that the Israelites were able to cross the Jordan only on account of the merit achieved by Jacob.

In the Torah: *For with my staff I crossed this Jordan and now I have become two camps* (**Gen. 32:11**).

In the Prophets: *You will tell your children, “Israel crossed this Jordan on dry land.”* (**Josh. 4:22**).

In the Writings: *What is wrong with you, O Sea, that you flee? O Jordan, that you turn away from before the God of Jacob* (**Ps. 114:5,7**).

Rabbi Levi said, There is a place where the Jordan falls with a roar into the hot springs of Tiberias. In his great trepidation, Jacob entered there and Esau shut him in, But the Holy One, blessed be He, dug an opening for Jacob at a different point, so that he got through. Thus it is written, *When you pass through water, I will be with you; Through streams, they shall not overwhelm you* (**Isaiah 43:2**).

Midrash B’reshith Rabbah 76.5

A mapping of the Jordan’s course in the Babylonian Talmud Tractate Baba Bathra 74b locates the river’s source in the wellspring of Eden and tracks its endpoint to time of redemption. Here, the Jordan terminates in the thirsty jaws of Leviathan and thus plays a role in the preparations for the World to Come.

Rabbi Judah further stated in the name of Rav: The Jordan issues from the cavern of Paneas [Banias]. It has been taught likewise: The Jordan issues from the cavern of Paneas and flows through the Sea of Sibkay (Huleh) and the Sea of Tiberias and rolls down into the Great Sea from whence it rolls on until it rushes into the mouth of Leviathan; for it is said: He is confident because the Jordan dashes forth into his mouth (Job 40:23). R. Abba b. ‘Ulla objected: This [verse] is written of Behemoth on a thousand hills!—But, said R. Abba b. ‘Ulla: When is Behemoth on a thousand hills confident?—When the Jordan rushes into the mouth of Leviathan (**Babylonian Talmud Tractate Baba Bathra 74b**).

The Jordan is a connector that links periods of time as well as bodies of water. Leviathan, the beast subdued by God during creation, drinks from the Jordan as well as from the sea in preparation for the day of his annihilation after which he will be served as the fish course in the messianic banquet attended by the righteous in the World to Come. As it flows from terrestrial lakes into the world ocean and into the mouth of Leviathan, the Jordan models the basic structure of rabbinic time—a historical present that leads to a messianic future.

Rachel Havrelock

The waters of the Jordan surround all the earth, half thereof (flow) above the earth and the other half below the earth

Pirke de Rabbi Eliezer, Ch. 11

JEWISH THOUGHT

ON THE CARE OF CREATION...

When God created the first human beings, God led them around the Garden of Eden and said: 'Look at my works! See how beautiful they are—how excellent! For your sake I created them all. See to it that you do not spoil and destroy My world; for if you do, there will be no one else to repair it.'

Midrash Kohelet Rabbah 1

ON THE BLESSING OF RAIN...

Rabbi Tanhum ben Hiyya said, "The falling of the rain is greater than the giving of the Torah, for the giving of the Law was a joy only to Israel, while the falling of the rain is a rejoicing for all the world, including the cattle and the wild beasts and the birds."

Midrash Tehillim 117

Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai said, "Three things are of equal importance - earth, humans and rain". Rabbi Levi ben Hiyata said, "...to teach that without earth, there is no rain, and without rain, the earth cannot endure, and without either, humans cannot exist".

Midrash B'reshith Rabbah 13:3

ON THE JUST MANAGEMENT OF WATER ...

The rivers and the springs that are drawn upon belong to everyone.

Tosefta (Bava Kamma 6:15)

ON AWE AND REVERENCE...

Small is the world that most of us pay attention to, and limited is our concern. What do we see when we see the world? There are three aspects of nature that command our attention: its power, its beauty, and its grandeur. Accordingly, there are three ways in which we may relate ourselves to the world – we may exploit it, we may enjoy it, we may accept it in awe.

Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel, God in Search of Man, 1959

ON HUMAN STEWARDSHIP AND RESPONSIBILITY...

There can be no doubt in the mind of any intelligent, thinking person that when the Torah instructs humankind to dominate – "And have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the sky, and over every living thing that moves upon the Earth" (Genesis 1:28) – it does not mean the domination of a harsh ruler, who afflicts his people and servants merely to fulfill his personal whim and desire, according to the crookedness of his heart. It is unthinkable that the Torah would impose such a decree of servitude, sealed for all eternity, upon the world of God, Who is "good to all, and His mercy is upon all His works" (Psalms 145:9), and Who declared, "The world shall be built upon kindness" (Psalms 89:3).

Abraham Isaac Kook

Regard all living things as God's property. Destroy none, abuse none, waste nothing, employ all things wisely...look upon all creatures as servants in the household of creation

Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch

The simplest image, and surely the most sensible one, in thinking about our ecological responsibilities is to see the earth as belonging to the source of being, and us as its trustees, charged with conserving and if possible beautifying it for the sake of our grandchildren not yet born

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, The Dignity of Difference

ON CARE FOR THE LAND OF ISRAEL...

In our generation, the Land has been transformed from a virtual reality into a very concrete one. Israel is no longer a dreamed-of abstraction but a flesh and blood country, with factories, parks, sewage, roads, wildlife, and millions of people – Jews and non-Jews – who call it home...the question of the environmental relationship of Jews to land, and of Jews to the Land, is a relatively new one. What does it mean to relate to the important concepts of a sense of place and responsibility for one's place as Jews, and specifically, as Jews living comfortably, and apparently permanently, in many places all over the world? And what does that mean regarding our relationship to the Land and to the State of Israel?

Jeremy Benstein, Judaism and the Environment

PRAYERS AND POEMS

A PRAYER OF PRAISE FOR CREATION...

Praised are You, Our God, Ruler of the universe, former of light, creator of darkness, maker of peace and the creator of all things. In Your mercy light shines over the earth and upon all who inhabit it. Through your goodness the work of the creation is daily renewed. How great are Your works, O God, in wisdom You have made all of them. The earth is filled with your creations.

Daily Prayer, Siddur Amidah, Yotzer Or (Former of Light)

ON SOLITUDE AND COMMUNION...

Master of the universe grant me the ability to be alone;

May it be my custom to go outdoors each day
Among the trees and the grass,
Among all growing things;
And, there may I be alone to enter into prayer
There I may express all that is in my heart
Talking to you, the one to whom I belong.

Rabbi Nachman of Bratslav (1772 – 1810)

ON THE MIRACLE OF THE EARTH'S BEAUTY...

With the ink of its showers and rains,
with the quill of its illuminating lightning,
and the hand of its clouds,
autumn wrote a letter upon the garden,
in purple and blue.

No artist could conceive of such things.
And this is why the earth,

grown jealous of the sky,
embroidered stars in the folds of the
flowerbeds.

**Solomon b. Judah Ibn Gabirol of Cordova
(c.1021-1058)**

ON WONDER AND GRATITUDE...

My friends, let us give thanks for Wonder.

Let us give thanks for the Wonder of Life that
infuses all things now and forever.

Blessed is the Source of Life, the Fountain of
Being the wellspring of goodness, compassion
and kindness, from which we draw to make for
justice and peace.

From the creative power of Life we derive food
and harvest, from the bounty of the earth and
the yields of the heavens we are sustained and
are able to sustain others.

All Life is holy, sacred, worthy of respect and
dignity.

Let us give thanks for the power of heart to
sense the holy in the midst of the simple. We
eat not simply to satisfy our own appetites, we
eat to sustain ourselves in the task we have
been given.

Each of us is unique, coming into the world with
a gift no other can offer: ourselves.

We eat to nourish the vehicle of giving, we eat
to sustain our task of world repair, our quest for
harmony, peace and justice.

We eat and we are revived, and we give thanks
to the lives that were ended to nourish our own.

May we merit their sacrifice, and honor their
sparks of holiness through our deeds of loving
kindness.

We give thanks to the Power that makes for
Meeting, for our table has been a place of
dialogue and friendship.

We give thanks to Life.
May we never lose touch with the simple joy and
wonder of sharing a meal.

Rabbi Rami M. Shapiro

SONGS RELATED TO THE JORDAN RIVER:

English translations provided below are unofficial

LA'SHIR ZE KMO LIHYOT YARDEN (TO SING IS LIKE TO BE THE JORDAN)

Lyrics and Music by: Naomi Shemer

To sing
Is like to be the Jordan:
You start up top in the north
Young, chilled, bubbling and cheeky
You hear birds in the thickets
And each one of them is
A bird of paradise
Because To sing
Is like to be the Jordan.

Your days
Rush like the Jordan
Like it you flow south
On the banks wild grasses grow
But onwards - onwards - onwards
Flow your waters
For do your days not
Rush like the Jordan

Your end is
To perish like the Jordan
To be gathered slowly into the dead sea
In the lowest place on earth
But
At the peaks of the snowy mountains
In a jubilant tumult
After you
Your songs are trickling on
For is not
To sing like to be the Jordan

לשיר
זה כמו להיות ירדן:
אתה מתחיל למעלה בצפון
צונן, צעיר, שוצף ומתחצף
אתה שומע ציפורים בסבך
וכל אחת מהן
ציפור גן עדן
כי לשיר
זה כמו להיות ירדן

ימיך
שוטפים כמו ירדן
וכמותו זורם אתה דרומה
על החופים צומח עשב פרא
אבל הלאה הלאה הלאה
גאון מימיך
הלא ימיך
שוטפים כמו ירדן

סופך
לגווע כמו ירדן
להאסף לאט אל ים המות
במקום הנמוך ביותר בעולם
אבל
מראש הרי השלג
בהמולה גדולה צוהלת
אחריך
שיריך מפכים להם
הלא
לשיר זה כמו להיות ירדן

NAGEN LI YARDEN (PLAY FOR ME, JORDAN)- נגן לי ירדן Lyrics by Yaakov Sharet, Music by Moni Amarilio

Play for me, Jordan,
On the Violin of the light blue waters.
Be tranquil my Kinneret
Your waves wonder me.
from the top of the Arbel
to you a prayer is said
I would add, will not swear
You are the apple of my eye Kinneret.

I will come back and look at you
Kinneret, Kinneret.
A thousand faces you have
Morning to night.

Reveal please, Golan,
I have a pale reflection,
Vulnerable and sad
In your waters, Galilee,
In the Jordan thread
On the Galil you are tied
And on his neck
To him you are a gem, Kinneret.

I will come back and look at you...

In the heat of the sun
I will immerse in your waters.
Rest, roam,
In the shadow of your oleanders.
And in the moon light
In a time I listen to you weaves,
I will hear like a dream
The echo of Rachel the singer.

I will come back and look at you...

נגן לי, ירדן,
על כינור מי התכלת.
המי נא כינרת
גלייך לי פלא.
ממרום הארבל
לך תפילה נאמרת,
אוסף, לא אשבע
לי את עין כינרת.

אחזור אסתכל בך
כינרת, כינרת.
כי אלף פנים לך
מבוקר עד ערב.

גלה נא, גולן,
בבואה לי חיוורת,
חשוף ועצוב
במימיך, כינרת,
בחוט הירדן
לגליל את נקשרת
ועל צווארו
לו עדי את, כינרת.

אחזור אסתכל בך...

בלהט השמש
אטבול במימיך.
אנוח, ההלך,
בצלך הרדופיך.
ולאור הלבנה
עת אקשיב לך מוזרת,
אשמע כבחלום
הד רחל המשוררת.

אחזור אסתכל בך..

ELAD YARAD EL HAYARDEN (ELAD WENT DOWN TO THE JORDAN) אלעד ירד אל הירדן
Lyrics and Music by Avraham Zigman

Elad descended to the Jordan
He saw everything blooming
The oleander smells the same
Just like at first.

אלעד ירד אל הירדן
הוא ראה הכל פורח
להרדוף אותו הריח
ממש כמו בראשונה.

Elad descended to the Jordan
The Arava is twice as green
And here the quiet water
Just like at first.

אלעד ירד אל הירדן
הערבה ירוקה כפליים
והנה שקטים המים
ממש כמו בראשונה.

Elad Elad will raise the bridge
As the forefathers did
Elad Elad will weave relationship
between the hearts.

אלעד אלעד יקים הגשר
כמעשה אבות
אלעד אלעד ירקום הקשר
בין הלבבות.

Elad descended to the Jordan
He abandoned slings
Ashlar stones he carved from rock
Just like at first.

אלעד ירד אל הירדן
הוא נטש אבני הקלע
אבני גזית חצב מסלע
ממש כמו בראשונה.

Elad descended to the Jordan
To renew ways of yore,
Old and young they descended
Just like at first.

אלעד ירד אל הירדן
לחדש אורחות כקדם,
זקן ונער במ ירדו
ממש כמו בראשונה.

Elad Elad will raise the bridge ...

אלעד אלעד יקים הגשר...

Elad descended to the Jordan
two camps he connected with the bridge
an alliance we will have and a bond
Just like at first.

אלעד ירד אל הירדן
שני מחנות חיבר בגשר
ברית תהי לנו וקשר
ממש כמו בראשונה.

Elad descended to the Jordan
He looked at the pale blue of the sky
Pure white doves he scattered skywards
Just like at first.

אלעד ירד אל הירדן
הוא הביט בתכול רקיע
יונים צחורות אל על הפריח
ממש כמו בראשונה.

Elad Elad establish a bridge ...

אלעד אלעד יקים הגשר...

HURSHAT HA'EKALIPTUS (THE EUCALYPTUS GROVE) – חורשת האקליפטוס
Lyrics and Music by: Naomi Shemer

When Mom came here pretty and young,
So Dad built her a house on a hill.
Springtime passed, half a century went by
Curls turned grey in the meantime.

כשאמא באה הנה יפה וצעירה,
אז אבא על גבעה בנה לה בית.
חלפו האביבים, חצי מאה עברה
ותלתלים הפכו שיבה בינתיים.

But on the banks of the Jordan as if nothing had happened,
The same silence... and the same backdrop
The eucalyptus grove, the bridge, the boat
The smell of the saltbush in the water.

אבל על חוף ירדן כמו מאומה לא קרה,
אותה הדומיה וגם אותה התפאורה:
חורשת האקליפטוס, הגשר, הסירה
וריח המלוח על המים.

Here, on the path, descends the group of babies,
They'll dip their feet in the Jordan
The children grew up and learned to swim
and the youth paddle in twos.

בשביל הנה יורדת עדת התינוקות,
הם בירדן ישכשכו רגליים
גדלו הילדים וכבר למדו לשחות
ובני הנעורים חותרים בשניים.

But on the banks of the Jordan...

אבל על חוף ירדן...

Cannons thundered across the Jordan
Peace returned in late summer
All the babies became people
And again on the hill the set up a home.

מעבר לירדן רעמו התותחים
והשלום חזר בסוף הקיץ
וכל התינוקות היו לאנשים
ושוב על הגבעה הקימו בית

But on the banks of the Jordan...

אבל על חוף ירדן...

OTHER REFLECTIONS & INSIGHTS

Writings from other traditions urging care for creation

NELSON MANDELA ON SEEING BEYOND OUR OWN LIFETIME...

“Our clean flowing rivers must be known by my grandchildren’s grandchildren, many years from now, just as I knew them as a child, many years ago.”

Nelson Mandela

‘NOW THE WATERS ARE POISONED’

We have forgotten who we are.
We have forgotten who we are.
We have alienated ourselves from the unfolding of the cosmos.
We have become estranged from the movements of the earth.
We have turned our backs on the cycles of life.
We have forgotten who we are.
We have sought only our own security.
We have exploited simply for our own ends.
We have distorted our knowledge.
We have abused our power.
We have forgotten who we are.
Now the land is barren.
And the waters are poisoned.
And the air is polluted.
We have forgotten who we are.
Now the forests are dying,
And the creatures are disappearing,
And the humans are despairing.
We have forgotten who we are.
We ask for forgiveness.
We ask for the gift of remembering.
We ask for the strength to change.
We have forgotten who we are.

UN Environmental Sabbath Program

TO RESTORE THE WATERS

We join with the earth and each other. To bring new life to the land. To restore the waters. To refresh the air.

We join with the earth and each other. To renew the forests To care for the plants. To protect the creatures.

We join with the earth and each other. To celebrate the seas To rejoice in the sunlight. To sing the song of the stars.

We join with the earth and each other. To recreate the human community. To promote justice and peace To remember our children.

We join with the earth and each other. We join together as many and diverse expressions. Of one loving mystery: for the healing of the Earth and the renewal of all life.

UN Environmental Sabbath Program

ON OUR INTER-DEPENDENCE WITH THE NATURAL WORLD...

Humans have become so numerous and our tools so powerful that we have driven fellow creatures to extinction, dammed the great rivers, torn down ancient forests, poisoned the earth, rain and wind, and ripped holes in the sky.

Our science has brought pain as well as joy; our comfort is paid for by the suffering of millions.

We are learning from our mistakes, we are mourning our vanished kin, and we now build a new politics of hope.

We respect and uphold the absolute need for clean air, water and soil.

We see that economic activities that benefit the few while shrinking the inheritance of many are wrong.

And since environmental degradation erodes biological capital forever, full ecological and social cost must enter all equations of development.

We are one brief generation in the long march of time; the future is not ours to erase.

So where knowledge is limited, we will remember all those who will walk after us, and err on the side of caution.

The Declaration of Inter-dependence, David Suzuki Foundation

TIMES AND SEASONS: SUKKOT

The holiday of Sukkot presents an opportunity for communities to engage with the call to bring mayim chayim - 'living water' - back to the Jordan River.

WATER AND SUKKOT

By Rabbi Jacob Elisha Fine

This article was written for Huffington Post by Rabbi Fine, Director of Programs at the Jewish Farm School, and is re-printed here with his kind permission.

"You are our God. Who causes the wind to blow and the rain to fall. May it bring blessing and not curse. May it bring life and not death. May it bring bounty and not famine."

From the Prayer for Rain recited on Shmini Atzeret

The holiday of Sukkot is the Jewish tradition's water festival. The Land of Israel depends on an all-important rainy season that typically begins around Sukkot and the themes of rain and water are embedded in the weeklong festival in a number of ways.

Whereas tradition holds that humans are judged for life or for death on Rosh Hashanah, on Sukkot God passes judgment for rain for the ensuing year (Mishnah, Rosh Hashanah 1:2). In ancient Israel, and still for most of the world today, a "bad judgment" amounting to inadequate and/or untimely rainfall is nothing short of disastrous.

With this appreciation of, and concern for, our utter dependence on water, Sukkot incorporates a number of sensorial rain-themed rituals, prayers and petitions that include shaking four biblical plant species associated with water, beating willow branches (one of the four species) on the earth, and on Shmini Atzeret, the one-day festival at the end of Sukkot, the recitation of a hauntingly beautiful Prayer for Rain.

The Torah is full of references to **mayim chayim**, "living waters." The language of **mayim chayim** is used in a number of contexts. It is used to describe the fresh, potable water that Isaac's servants find when re-digging Abraham's stopped wells (Genesis 26:19), and by the prophet Jeremiah who refers to the Creator as the "Source of Living Waters" (Jeremiah 17:13). Finally, the language of "living waters" is used commonly in the context of ritual purification for both people and for objects (Numbers 19:17, for example).

The common thread between these various uses of **mayim chayim** is water's primary association with our very existence. In each of these cases, water is meant to be taken both literally and metaphorically as a substance upon which humans, and all life, depends. The early rabbis later came to distinguish "living water" to be found in flowing forms such as

rain, streams, lakes and springs from "dead water" that has been sitting stagnant in a well or closed body of water and is, therefore, unacceptable for purification purposes.

The conclusion of the Prayer for Rain that Jews recite on Shmini Atzeret pleads, "You are our God. Who causes the wind to blow and the rain to fall. May it bring blessing and not curse. May it bring life and not death. May it bring bounty and not famine."

In our generation, Sukkot is an opportunity to wake up to the damage we are doing to the Living Waters. While Jews plead and pray that we be inscribed for life during the High Holy Days, on Sukkot it is fitting that we pray for the strength of character, the will and the heart to protect our planet's watersheds and waterways as if they were the arteries and channels running through our own bodies. And this year, may water be for life and not for death.

JEWISH DECLARATIONS ON ECOLOGY

JEWISH DECLARATION ON NATURE

This is the Jewish declaration on Nature, taken from the original Assisi Declarations on Nature which were created in 1986, at a meeting held in Assisi by WWF-International, at which five leaders of the five major world religions were invited to come and discuss how their faiths could help save the natural world.

“WHOEVER IS MERCIFUL to all creatures is a descendant of our ancestor Abraham” (Bezah 32b). In the sacred writings of Judaism, Jews are described over and over again as “merciful people, the children of merciful people.” (Yebamot 79a, Shabbat 133b). The Talmud even tells us (Shabbat 151b) that heaven rewards the person who has concern and compassion for the rest of creation, but this assurance of reward is not the major moral thrust of Jewish teaching. Our tradition emphasizes that Jews are commanded to do what is moral, “not for the sake of receiving a reward” (Abot 1:3). The good is necessary even when it does not redound to our immediate, personal benefit.

When God created the world, so the Bible tells us, He made order out of the primal chaos. The sun, the moon, and the stars, plants, animals, and ultimately man, were each created with a rightful and necessary place in the universe. They were not to encroach on each other, “Even the divine teaching, the Torah, which was revealed from on high, was given in a set measure” (Leviticus Rabbah 15:2) and even these holy words may not extend beyond their assigned limit. “And the Lord took man and put him in the Garden of Eden, to tend it and guard it” (Genesis 2:15). Soon Adam, man, the one creature who is most godlike, gave names to all of creation, as God looked on and approved. “And the name that Adam gave to each living being

has remained its name” (Genesis 2:19) forever. In the Kabbalistic teaching, as Adam named all of God’s creatures, he helped define their essence. Adam swore to live in harmony with those whom he had named. Thus, at the very beginning of time, man accepted responsibility before God for all of creation.

Judaism, of course, knows the doctrine of the world beyond death, but its central concern is with life in this world. The tzaddik, the righteous Jew, is not a pillar saint who has withdrawn from the world. He is someone whose conduct in the very midst of life helps to establish that which seems impossible – one can live in this world of righteousness without encroaching on the rights of other people, or of any of God’s creatures.

The festivals of the Jewish religion do call upon us to stand before God, in the awe at His majesty, trembling before His judgments, but that is not the dominant mood of the Jewish faith. The festivals celebrate, in joy, the cycle of the seasons of nature. The rabbis even insisted that: “He who has denied himself any one of the rightful joys in this world is a sinner” (Baba Kama 91b). The highest form of obedience to God’s commandments is to do them not in mere acceptance but in the nature of union with Him. In such a joyous encounter between man and God, the very rightness of the world is affirmed.

The encounter of God and man in nature is thus conceived in Judaism as a seamless web with man as the leader and custodian of the natural world. Even in the many centuries when Jews were most involved in their immediate dangers and destiny, this universalist concern has never withered. In this century, Jews have experienced the greatest tragedy of their history when one third of their people were murdered by unnatural men and, therefore, we are today particularly sensitive to the need for a world in which each of God’s creations in what He intended it to be. Now, when the whole world is in peril, when the environment is in danger of being poisoned and various species, both plant and animal, are becoming extinct, it is our Jewish responsibility to put the defense of the whole of nature at the very centre of our concern.

And yet it must be said, in all truth, that this question of man’s responsibility to the rest of creation cannot be defined by simply expressing our respect for all of nature. There is a tension at the centre of the Biblical tradition, embedded in the very story of creation itself, over the question of power and stewardship. The world was created because God willed it, but why did He will it? Judaism has maintained, in all its versions, that this world is the arena that God created for man, half beast and half angel, to prove that he could behave as a moral being. The Bible did not fail to demand even of God

Himself that He be bound, as much as man, by the law of morality. Thus, Abraham stood before God, after He announced that He was about to destroy the wicked city of Sodom, and Abraham demanded of God Himself that He produce moral justification for this act: “Shall not judge of all the earth do justice?” (Bereshit 18:25). Comparably, man was given dominion over nature, but he was commanded to behave towards the rest of creation with justice and compassion. Man lives, always, in tension between his power and the limits set by conscience.

Man’s carnivorous nature is not taken for granted, or praised, in the fundamental teachings of Judaism. The rabbis of the Talmud told that men were vegetarians in earliest times, between creation and the generation of Noah. In the twelfth century Maimonides, the greatest of all rabbinic scholars, explained that animal sacrifices had been instituted in ancient Judaism as a concession to the prevalent ancient practice of making such offerings to the pagan gods (The Guide for the Perplexed P111:32). The implication is clear, that Judaism was engaged in weaning men from such practices.

Judaism as a religion offers the option of eating animal flesh, and most Jews do, but in our own century there has been a movement towards vegetarianism among very pious

A COMMON DECLARATION ON THE ENVIRONMENT

Jews. A whole galaxy of central rabbinic and spiritual teachers, including several past and present Chief Rabbis of the Holy Land, have been affirming vegetarianism as the ultimate mean of the Jewish moral teaching. They have been proclaiming the autonomy of all living creatures as the value which our religious tradition must now teach to all of its believers. Let this affirmation resound this day and in the days to come. Let it be heard by all our brethren, wherever they may be, as the commandment which we must strive to realize. This cannot be achieved in one generation, and it will not happen through pressure from within or without. Jews will move increasingly to vegetarianism out of their deepening knowledge of what their tradition commands, as they understand it in this age.

Our ancestor Abraham inherited his passion for nature from Adam. The later rabbis never forgot it. Some twenty centuries ago they told the story of two men who were out on the water in a rowboat. Suddenly, one of them started to saw under his feet. He maintained that it was his

right to do whatever he wished with the place which belonged to him. The other answered him that they were in the rowboat together; the hole that he was making would sink both of them. (Leviticus Rabbah 4:6).

We have a responsibility to life, to defend it everywhere, not only against our own sins but also against those of others. We are all passengers together in this same fragile and glorious world. Let us safeguard our rowboat – and let us row together.

INTERNATIONAL CATHOLIC-JEWISH LIAISON COMMITTEE

NB: This is an abridged version of the statement. You can find the complete declaration at the website of Rabbi David Rosen - www.rabbidavidrosen.net

Across the world people are becoming increasingly aware that certain forms of human activity are leading to environmental damage and seriously limiting the possibility of a sustainable development for all. Climate change, air and water pollution, desertification, resource depletion, and loss of biodiversity are among the consequences. While many have contributed to this damage, all must learn to live in a way which respects the integrity of the delicate balance that exists among the earth's ecosystems.

[...]

The respect due to each person, endowed with a God-given dignity, allows for no exception and excludes no ones. Life is precious. We are to affirm it, to promote it, to care for and cherish it. When harm is done to the environment, the lives of both individuals and communities are profoundly affected. Any social, economic, or political activity that directly or indirectly destroys life or diminishes the possibility for people to live in dignity is counter to God's will.

[...]

The human person has an immense responsibility, that of caring for all of creation. No person or group can use the resources of this earth as proprietor, but only as God's steward who destined these goods for all.

[...]

Our responsibility for all that dwells in the earth and for the earth itself extends into the future. The earth is not ours to destroy (cf. Dt 20:19), but to hand on in trust to future generations. We cannot, therefore, recklessly consume its resources to satisfy needs that are artificially created and sustained by a society that tends to live only for the present. We also need to act, together whenever feasible, to assure that sound practices, guaranteed by law, are established in our countries and local communities for the future preservation of the environment.

Respect for God's creation, of which we are a part, must become a way of life. We therefore call upon our respective religious communities and families to educate children, both by teaching and example, to fulfill the trust that God has confided to us.

"The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof; the world and those who dwell therein"
(Ps 24:1)



III. EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES

A MODULAR LESSON PLAN FOR USING THE WATER, ECOLOGY, AND THE JORDAN RIVER IN THE JEWISH TRADITION SOURCEBOOK

Prepared by Rabbi Michael Schwartz

INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW:

This sample lesson plan aims to provide ideas for using the **Water, Ecology, and the Jordan River in the Jewish Tradition sourcebook** in your community. As an educator, a rabbi, a youth group leader, or a volunteer helping your community coordinate an event or class that focuses on the Jordan River, this modular lesson plan offers “Do-It-Yourself” ideas and almost “ready-made” programming that you can easily adapt to your community and the participants in your program.

The program ideas outlined here are designed for use in any number of venues - the classroom, in nature, as the focus of a community or youth event - and notes how the program might be adapted for either larger or smaller numbers of participants. Similarly, the program ideas are varied so that you can adapt them to different age and target groups:

- Adults
- Teens in youth group
- Jewish Day School students
- Environmental activists or your synagogue committee for Israel, the environment, social justice, etc.
- Text study groups

This English language program is designed to address Jews living outside Israel, while a Hebrew language program (available in the Hebrew version of the sourcebook) addresses Israelis specifically.

The goal of the program is for participants to gain an understanding of the Jordan River’s significance to their personal Jewish identity, to learn about the Jordan River’s current condition, and to consider the physical, spiritual, historical, and other impacts of the river’s demise. Participants will learn what they personally can do to help save the river and be inspired to participate in community-sponsored efforts to promote the Jordan River’s rehabilitation.

The outline below includes several ideas for introducing the program and grabbing peoples’ attention. This segment highlights the importance of the Jordan River for the participants. After establishing the relevance of the Jordan River to your participants, awareness of the river’s current condition should come as a shock. Facilitation of a discussion about what the river’s poor condition “means”, or how it impacts the participants on a spiritual, ideological or other level will deepen the existential concern for these issues, for example:

- The contradiction between the river’s depleted and polluted condition today with our basic assumption that as Jews and supporters of Israel we love and protect the land of Israel.
- The continuity of generations from Abraham’s time and down to our own and to that of our grandchildren and theirs: What can we learn about our ideals and values as a society in light of the unsustainable

condition of this unique and (supposedly) treasured natural resource?

- For the future of Israel and the world: If the river reflects the condition of society, towards what future are we rapidly flowing?

Finally, the program concludes on a positive note by identifying both what is being done and what more can be done...including especially what can be done by the participants to help rehabilitate the Jordan River.

Each segment can stand alone and thus form a series of activities and meetings, or a short curriculum of study.

I. “JUMP INTO THE JORDAN!”

Introduce your program and help focus participants’ attention by trying to establish a connection between the Jordan River and the participants. This segment of the program needs to answer the question “Why are we learning about the Jordan River now?”

For youth (and probably adults as well) you can begin with a short “quiz” about the Jordan. The “quiz” will provide some introductory information in a fun way, create a feeling of connection to the river, and emphasize the river’s historical importance.

Sample questions for a quiz include:

1. Archeological findings from the Jordan

River Valley testify to some of the earliest agricultural settlements in human history. These findings, dating to some _____ years ago make the Jordan River Valley an invaluable historical treasure for all humanity.

- a. 2,000 years
- b. 3,500 years
- c. 10,000 years
- d. 150,000 years

2. Three Biblical cities located along the banks of the Jordan River are:

- a. Gilgal
- b. Mashkiyot
- c. Jericho
- d. Beit Shean

3. Which historical event did NOT happen in the Jordan River?

- a. Sisra’s army was drowned in a flash flood
- b. Elisha the Prophet made a lost axe float
- c. Elijah the Prophet rode a fiery chariot into the heavens
- d. The People of Israel crossed into the Promised land after wandering in the desert for 40 years.

Other questions can be added which both challenge and interest your particular group focusing on history, Tanach, the place of the Jordan in culture and song, flora and fauna, etc.

You can summarize the “quiz” by assigning points for the various answers and generally

evaluating the participants' "immersion" in the Jordan: 1-10 points, for example, could be designated as an acacia tree in the desert distantly overlooking the river - "you have a lot still to learn about the Jordan"; 11-20 points could be designated as river reed close by the shore - "not bad - continue to learn"; and 21-30 points could be designated a river rock - "Kol Hakavod! You are a Jordan River expert!"

Ask whether the "quiz" had information that was surprising. Did they expect they knew less or more about the Jordan than they thought they did? To introduce the next section, you could say something like "now that we know a few facts about the Jordan River, we can truly imagine it...."

In a classroom, auditorium, or similar venue:

1. Use **guided imagery** to take participants on a "tour" of the world-famous and mighty Jordan River, through time until today. Use the Biblical references to the Jordan cited in the sourcebook, beginning with Lot and Abraham, in Joshua's day, at the visits of Elijah and Elisha. The images can be supplemented with the **Prayers, Songs, and Poems** section of the sourcebook, or folk songs that might be familiar to the participants ("The Jordan River is deep and wide, halleluya...." from **Michael Rowed the Boat Ashore**, etc.). Afterward, ask participants to describe the Jordan River in 1-3 words ("calm", "peaceful", "full of life", "holy", etc.) List these on a marker board, projection screen, or poster page, etc. Later, you can "revisit" the Jordan today and contrast the image of the river's demise with the Biblical image and their "feelings" about the Jordan.
2. Explore the Jordan River's impact on the popular imagination, as a "holy river", the

river at the cradle of civilization (where crops were first farmed and with Jericho among the world's oldest inhabited cities), as the Biblical river: In large font, print out quotations describing the natural Jordan River found in the sourcebook (suggestions are from pages 16 and 17; Biblical quotes from pages 38-42, and from the poems and songs pages 46-53 as well as other descriptive passages throughout) or other sources ("Roll River Jordan roll / Meet me at the bank of the beautiful river / There will be trial and tribulation along the way / And I'm makin' way, for a better day / Roll River Jordan roll / In this a fountain that flow so deep and wide / There can be no sorrow, can't wait for tomorrow, etc.).

Participants have 5 minutes to "picture" the Jordan in their minds' eye (you might ask them to do this **before** they read the quotations, or without using them at all) then provide paper and colors (or other art supplies) and ask participants to express their vision of the Jordan River. (Divide a large group into teams of 2-3 participants who collaborate on the artwork). The art can be shared with the group and explained. Conclude by asking the group to complete this sentence/ short paragraph describing the Jordan River, based on their collective vision: "The River Jordan is one of the world's most important rivers because _____". Write this as another large font quotation and post on the wall. It will be used to contrast with the reality of the river today in the next program segment.

3. Similar to the above, you could instead describe a mock contest, saying that the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation is sponsoring a contest to award \$20 billion to help the world's most important river in terms of development and preservation, tourism,

clean-up, etc. The Foundation is interested in the river's importance to the people that live alongside it and who value it from afar, so people's groups rather than governments will represent the rivers. Your group has been selected to present the Jordan River to the contest's judges. Divide your group into 6 teams who will each have 3 minutes to present some key aspect of the Jordan River. Using the information noted in 2 above, address: Flora and fauna, history, in Judaism, in spirituality and world culture, beauty, and as a resource.

Outdoors or on the banks of your own nearby river:

4. Tell the group they are on a pilgrimage. Not the Plymouth Rock kind of pilgrims, however. Rather, the **oleh regel** kind, as a pilgrim on. [Wikipedia: A pilgrim (from the Latin **peregrinus**) is a traveler (literally one who has come from afar) who is on a journey to a holy place. Typically, this is a physical journeying (often on foot) to some place of special significance to the adherent of a particular religious belief system; An **oleh regel** is the Hebrew term for one who would go up (by walking usually) to Jerusalem and the Temple in ancient times. The same word, **oleh**, connects the idea to making an **aliya** to the Torah in the synagogue today and in making **aliya**, literally, an "ascent" to visit or live in the land of Israel.] Discuss briefly: What kinds of things do people look for or discover on a pilgrimage? Why do they go? What do they gain or find?

During your "pilgrimage" hike, rest at a picturesque and comfortable location. Explain that in Jewish tradition there is an idea that no matter where you are going, you are always on a journey, a pilgrimage, to the Land of Israel. Use one of the two activities

noted above, together with the inspiration of your surroundings, to have the participants express what - if they were making this pilgrimage along the Jordan River - they would expect to look for or discover, answer why they go or what they hope to gain or find. Discuss similarities and differences between the "pilgrimage" they are on and a "pilgrimage" along the Jordan River.

Or

5. Read quotations from Mark Twain's *The Innocents Abroad* (1869):
"The Jordan, Jericho and the Dead Sea were suggested...The journey was approved at once. New life stirred in every pulse. In the saddle-- abroad on the plains--sleeping in beds bounded only by the horizon: fancy was at work with these things in a moment. --It was painful to note how readily these town-bred men had taken to the free life of the camp and the desert. The nomadic instinct is a human instinct; it was born with Adam and transmitted through the patriarchs, and after thirty centuries of steady effort, civilization has not educated it entirely out of us yet. It has a charm which, once tasted, a man will yearn to taste again..."

When I was a boy I somehow got the impression that the river Jordan was four thousand miles long and thirty-five miles wide.... There is the Sea of Galilee and this Dead Sea--when I was in Sunday School I thought they were sixty thousand miles in diameter."

Pause---ask the group: For those who have NEVER been to Israel, how long do you think the Jordan is? How wide the Sea of Galilee and the Dead Sea? Can those who HAVE visited Israel describe what they saw of the Lower Jordan? Why Does Mark Twain say he had the impression that these objects of

their pilgrimage are so grand? What do you all imagine the Jordan to be like? Ask about size, quality, to describe its beauty (perhaps in contrast to what you see around you now—more green or less, more tree or less, wetter or drier, more populated or cultivated or less?, etc.), its importance, meaning, value—why was Twain and his fellow pilgrims so excited to go to the Jordan?

Now read Twain’s full quotation:

“When I was a boy I somehow got the impression that the river Jordan was four thousand miles long and thirty-five miles wide. It is only ninety miles long, and so crooked that a man does not know which side of it he is on half the time. In going ninety miles it does not get over more than fifty miles of ground. It is not any wider than Broadway in New York.

There is the Sea of Galilee and this Dead Sea--neither of them twenty miles long or thirteen wide. And yet when I was in Sunday School I thought they were sixty thousand miles in diameter.

Travel and experience mar the grandest pictures and rob us of the most cherished traditions of our boyhood. Well, let them go. I have already seen the Empire of King Solomon diminish to the size of the State of Pennsylvania; I suppose I can bear the reduction of the seas and the river.

THEMES TO ADDRESS:

You might choose to focus your attention on one of the following themes that are explored in the sourcebook as you establish the importance of the Jordan River’s rehabilitation/ concern for its demise in regard to your particular group:

- The Jordan as the river we (and others) associate with the Jewish People;
- Our own Jewish religious and/or national identity is connected to the Jordan;
- Our love for the Land of Israel;
- Jewish views on our responsibility for God’s world in general and/or for the Land of Israel in particular;
- The Jordan River as a symbol of universal spirituality;
- The Jordan River’s major role in Jewish and world cultural heritage;
- The Jordan River as a symbol of, and an opportunity for, peace building in the Middle East and through inter-religious dialogue worldwide;
- “Crossing over the Jordan”.

II. “THE JORDAN TURNED BACK...”

Having established why are we learning about the Jordan River now and why we care about the Jordan (in the context of one of the above themes, another, or in general), the next segment of the program aims to convey the magnitude of the problem.

In a larger venue, outside, or with a smaller group:

1. Ask participants to stand in the center of the room. Explain that you will ask some questions and they need to go to this side (point to the right) if the answer is TRUE, or to that side (point to the left) if the answer is false. This or that, true or false, no remaining in the middle. (It helps hang up large posters that say “True” and “False”.)

Ask questions from the sourcebook page 19, “The Destruction of the Jordan - Some Facts And Figures”, in the following manner. Aim to have participants think about the data, internalizing it. Examples:

Q: The Lower Jordan River begins at Lake Kinneret and flows south for about 300 miles before reaching its end at the Dead Sea.

A: False. It flows a distance of only about 120 km, or 74 miles. However, because it is so windy, its length if you stretched it out would be far longer.

Q: If the blood in your body was the Jordan River’s water, you would have remaining in you only about the amount of blood in one of your feet left to you: Today only about 4% of the river’s flow remains – 96% has been diverted.

A: True.

Q: Because there is so little water left in the Jordan, the water that remains in the holy Jordan River is considered to be so pure and concentrated with holiness that recently Elon Musk’s Space X company began researching its use as an ingredient for a next stage space propulsion fuel.

A: False, alas, the mere 4% of the Jordan River that still trickles along is neither pure nor holy: It is composed of sewage water, fish pond discharge, agricultural run-off, and diverted saline spring water...

Q: The remaining water in the holy Jordan River is nevertheless, despite the pollution, considered to be so concentrated with holiness that recently the Archbishop of Canterbury was dispatched by Queen Elizabeth to collect a sample which was then used to baptize the new baby of Prince William and Catherine Middleton.

A: Somewhat true—the water was used to baptize the baby (but we hope it was filtered first!) However, the Archbishop of Canterbury was NOT sent to collect the water. Access to the Lower Jordan River

is extremely limited. Most of the Lower Jordan River is a closed military zone on both of its banks.

Q: The Dead Sea is disappearing because the Jordan River is not resupplying it.

A: 60% True...the Dead Sea is dropping over 1 meter per year. An estimated 60% of the Dead Sea’s loss is due to the Jordan River’s demise, with the remaining 40% due to private companies’ mining operations that pump water out of the Dead Sea to augment evaporation and extraction of minerals.

You get the idea....

In a classroom setting or event too large for the above activity:

2. Screen the video found on the SaveTheJordan.com website.
3. Screen the power point found on the SaveTheJordan.com website, using the screen notes under each picture to describe the river’s condition. This power point also uses a “before and after” approach is showing classical pictures of the Jordan followed by photos of the situation today.

For both of these, contrast the reality of today with the vision of the Jordan articulated in the program’s introduction.

Refer to page 20, **A Failure of Wisdom**, to outline briefly how this has come about. Although assigning blame for the river’s demise is not the focus of this activity or of the campaign, your participants will want some explanation.

Use this opportunity to summarize what has been learned so far and to highlight the contrast between the natural Jordan River and all its very positive associations, grand history, and spiritual record with its severely degraded state today.

As you facilitate a short discussion to summarize the program thus far, ask for participants' reactions and feelings about the great disparity between the idyllic Jordan River and the reality. Several of the sourcebook's essays provide source material for reflection about water consciousness, the idea of stewardship, about Judaism and ecology, our role as protectors of Creation, and more.

A summary of the causes (conflict, climate change, etc.) might conclude with:

“This is perhaps the best short definition of humanity’s responsibility for nature as the Bible conceives it. We do not own nature – “The earth is the Lord’s and the fullness thereof.” (Psalms 24:1) We are its stewards on behalf of God, who created and owns everything. As guardians of the earth, we are duty-bound to respect its integrity.” (Rabbi Jonathan Sacks) The lack of a sense of wonder, the loss of reverence for life, the abandonment of our responsibility as custodians – all of this has contributed to the destruction of the Jordan. The revival of the river, then, requires not just a shift in policy, but a renewed spiritual effort to honor the creation that God has entrusted to us.

III. “RIVER OF LIFE”

This segment of the program requires facilitation with positive energy! There IS something that can be done!! Review the sourcebook’s **A Measure of Progress**, p.23.

This is a good time to introduce EcoPeace/ FoEME and its vision for using the environment to promote cooperation and to build peace. We can protect and revivify nature rather than destroy it, and practice cooperation rather than competition and conflict, act on our spiritual values rather than only our crass geo-strategic or material interests.

In a classroom or auditorium, you can use a projector for p.25, outlining EcoPeace/FoEME’s plan for reviving the Jordan.

Ideas for Action on sourcebook pages 71-73 can be discussed. As the facilitator or perhaps the community organizer, you should have a realistic sense of what your group or community can accomplish. Discuss these possibilities and evaluate the level of enthusiasm. Decide on a first next step. Ask individuals what they will be willing to help with. Formulate a plan for action.

A great first step will be getting the participants to sign a copy of the Covenant for the Jordan River. Whom else can they ask to sign on? Will they send this to friends on social networks? Will they form a delegation to speak with the community rabbi, the city’s Board of Rabbis? The mayor?

CONCLUSION

1. Screen with audio the Jordan River Love Song. This video would also serve well at the start of this last program segment. Especially for teens, the video can focus your group on discussing what role they can accept in trying to help.
2. Hold a signing ceremony as participants sign on the Covenant for the Jordan River
3. Write a new song or plan a community (or interfaith) concert of “Jordan River Songs”.
4. If on a hike or in nature, you might:

- Choose a spot and construct a cairn and anoint with oil, similar to what the Israelites did when they crossed the Jordan, letting this event serve as a ceremony marking your group’s commitment to help save the Jordan (and/ or to solve a local environmental issue).
- Conclude with a prayer service in nature, perhaps ending with “Michael Rowed the Boat Ashore”.
- Sign two copies of the Jordan River Covenant – one to keep and one written with biodegradable materials which you can cut into tiny pieces and have the group distribute into your nearby river--- expecting that some little piece will make its way to the Jordan because the ecosystem is a single whole. You all are sending a message to the Jordan that help is on the way...



IV. IDEAS FOR COMMUNITY ACTION

Reviving the Jordan River will not be easy. It is a challenge that requires real political commitment from leaders on all sides of the valley.

And that's where you come in.

We need to push this issue up the political agenda – to raise our voices and let Israeli, Palestinian, and Jordanian decision-makers know that we care about this river and expect them to act.

The Jordan River flows through the heart of the Jewish tradition, and for that reason its revival is a not simply a question of politics – it is also a moral and spiritual challenge for Jews. The Jordan River belongs to us all. If we want it to survive, we cannot remain silent.

HOW TO JOIN THE CAMPAIGN

- **Sign the Covenant for the Jordan River.** The Covenant is a vision statement articulating the Jordan River's outstanding value to humanity. Endorsing the covenant demonstrates commitment to champion the rehabilitation of the Jordan in one's communities and vis-a-vis the world's decision makers. Join congregations and leaders around the world by endorsing the Covenant for the Jordan River as an individual or community. You'll find the text of the Covenant on the inside cover of this document.
- **Get together.** Establish a circle of friends, classmates, or co-workers from your community. You might be a group of three or three hundred. It doesn't matter. Together, you can make a difference.



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“The Jordan River is of enormous ecological, historical and spiritual significance both for the peoples who live in this Land and for those who hold it dear. Accordingly, its revivification is an urgent imperative for us all.”

Rabbi David Rosen, International President of Religions for Peace

- **Get inspired.** When you’ve got a group, you need to tell them what happened to the river, why it matters, and what they can do about it. FoEME can provide films, presentations, and fact sheets to help you tell this story.
- **Identify your target.** You need to let decision-makers know that you care about the river and want them to act. It is crucial to address this message to the right person. If you’re in one of the countries that border the river, it might be a mayor or minister. If you’re part of a religious congregation, it might be the most senior representative of your community. If you’re outside the Middle East, you might need to address your elected representatives, or the national ambassadors from the countries that share the river. You are in the best position to make this call. Discuss it with your group, and come up with the names and addresses of the political, religious, or civil society leaders you are going to approach.
- **Get the message across.** When you know what you want to say and who you want to say it to, you need to decide how to get the message across.

IDEAS FOR ACTION

WRITE

Old-fashioned paper mail is more effective than email, and personal, hand-written letters tend to make more impact. Pictures, poems and postcards can all help your letter to stand out. On our website you’ll find sample letters, fact sheets, and stories to help you make the case.

MEET

Why not invite your representative or leader to a meeting, so s/he can learn more about the issue and start to work with you on the campaign?

GET NOTICED

Organize a creative, peaceful, attention-grabbing stunt to bring the Jordan River to the attention of political leaders. Remember to invite the local media, and to get your message as clear as possible. FoEME has used this strategy to great effect in the Middle East – you are welcome to contact us for ideas and advice.

LEARN, CREATE, EXHIBIT

If you are a schoolteacher or faith leader, you may want to design an educational project about

the river. This could produce paintings, poems, songs, films, or photos that you can exhibit to raise awareness about the state of the Jordan. Think about which religious or political leaders – as well as which media outlets - you could invite to such an event. A module of this kind is not only raises environmental consciousness; it can also offer young people an education in global citizenship, grassroots activism, and participation in the democratic process.

USE YOUR IMAGINATION

These are not the only ways to raise awareness about the state of the Jordan River. Use your imagination. Make some noise. And keep it positive - you’ll be more effective if you address political leaders as partners, and ask them to join you in this effort, rather than treating them as an obstacle.

OTHER WAYS TO HELP

- **Spread the word.** Use your social networks to call for the revival of the Jordan River. Let people know what the problem is, why you care, and what you’re doing to help. On our website you’ll find videos, photos, and

even sample posts to help get the word out – but your own voice is the most powerful. Please tell us what you’re doing via Twitter and Facebook - it helps us build momentum behind the campaign.

- **Invite FoEME to speak to your community.** Get in touch if you would like someone from FoEME to speak to your community about the Jordan River.
- **Come to the river.** If you want to get more deeply involved, organize a journey to see the Jordan River for yourself. FoEME runs tours and EcoParks – ideas places to stay and to learn - on both sides of the valley. A journey like this will equip you with first-hand knowledge that you can use to advocate for the river in your home community. We can also put you in touch with tour operators and local partners (including environmental and faith groups) that’ll help make your trip safe and successful.
- **Donate.** We need your financial support to continue this effort. You can donate directly at www.SaveTheJordan.com or, better still, use your local campaign to raise funds.

V. CREDITS

BIBLICAL TRANSLATIONS

All English-language excerpts from the Tanakh are taken from the New Jewish Publication Society (JPS) Bible (1985).

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ABOUT ECOPEACE / FRIENDS OF THE EARTH MIDDLE EAST

EcoPeace/ Friends of the Earth Middle East (FoEME) is a unique organization at the forefront of the environmental peacemaking movement. As a tri-lateral organization that brings together Jordanian, Palestinian, and Israeli environmentalists, our primary objective is the promotion of cooperative efforts to protect our shared environmental heritage. In so doing, we seek to advance both sustainable regional development and the creation of necessary conditions for lasting peace in our region. FoEME has offices in Amman, Bethlehem, and Tel-Aviv.

For more information on FoEME or to download any of our publications please visit: www.foeme.org

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