

Every year, we celebrate Passover, commemorating our people's liberation from slavery over 3,000 years ago by retelling the story of our Exodus from Egypt. Every year, we have the opportunity to find new meaning in that story. This year, 2008, Earth Day falls during Passover, on the 3rd day, providing an opportunity to focus on the connection between the story of our liberation from slavery and the current struggle to liberate ourselves from individual and societal patterns that are destroying our environment. Earth Day and Passover also provides us with a special opportunity to reflect on how we have, in a few short months, incorporated caring for the earth into so many facets of our communal life at Beth Rishon.

Let's start here and look at what we have accomplished together since June 2007.

1. Our leadership, including: the clergy, the president, our Board of Trustees and our professional staff has all embraced the concept of "Tikkun Olam" and have made caring for the earth part of our everyday activities at Beth Rishon.
2. We have a strong and vibrant Environmental Committee, T'Green Olam, which is looking at a wide range of opportunities that can make our community more environmentally sensitive.
3. Green Faith, a New Jersey based interfaith environmental organization, has accepted us as a participant in their Sustainable Sanctuaries program, a rigorous two year commitment to become an example of environmental stewardship in our Northern New Jersey community.
4. Our Hebrew School has conducted discussions with our students on global warming and has taken on various Mitzvah projects to promote environmental awareness. (Make sure you support the Hebrew School and purchase one of our great TBR reusable shopping bags!)
5. Our office is using only recycled paper.
6. Our custodial staff has stepped up our recycling program Temple-wide.
7. We have a monthly column in our Temple Bulletin to raise awareness on Environmental Issues from a Jewish perspective.

Passover is rich with teachings we can use to live more sustainably and happily on earth. One of the names for Passover is *Z'man Chay-Ru-Tay-Nu*, the time of our freedom. As we go through this holiday, let's think about the degree to which we are enslaved by our addiction to material things. Let's think about what it costs us as individuals, families, and communities to pursue the consumptive lifestyle to which we have become accustomed. Let's think about what our real material needs are and how they might be satisfied at less cost to each other and to the rest of life on the planet. Let's think about who our Pharaohs are - the forces in our society and within each of us that make us want more and more. Let's think about who are Moses' are - who, within us and around us, can help us break out of patterns of over consumption and materialism? Let's think about the other ways in which Judaism in general and Passover in particular can help us lead happier, more fulfilling, and less consumptive lives

One of Passover's lessons is learned to distinguish between more and enough. Dayenu means "it would have been enough for us." Often, enjoying more wealth and comfort stimulates our desire for more - more attention, more comforts, more money, more, more, more. Passover and the Haggadah teach us to be mindful of what our real needs are, of what constitutes "enough."

What constitutes enough for you? What material objects or consumptive activities could you do without?

At your Seder this year, make up your own verses to the Dayenu tune, stating what would be enough and what can be done without.

For example:

If we had enough clothes for comfort
and we didn't have such full closets - Dayenu

If we biked or walked to our daily destinations
and we didn't use our cars everyday - Dayenu

If we purchased from bulk containers
and we didn't have disposable packaging - Dayenu

If our stuff was built to last
and we rarely threw anything away - Dayenu

And your own verses...

Celebrate the Earth this month, Happy Earth Day (April 22nd), and Happy Passover!
(Source: COEJL Program Pages)