

Six Biblical Values For An Age of Climate Crisis

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1. Stewardship: We have Responsibilities for Creation

וַיִּקַּח ה' אֱלֹקִים אֶת־הָאָדָם וַיְנַחֵהוּ בְּגַן־עֵדֶן לְעַבְדָּהּ וּלְשָׁמְרָהּ :

The Lord G-d took the human and placed him in the garden of Eden, to work it and protect it.

2. Sabbatical & Jubilee (Shmita & Yovel): We Do Not Own the Earth



אמר הקב"ה לישראל זרעו שש והשמיטו שבע כדי שתדעו שהארץ שלי היא

“The Holy Blessed One said to Israel: Sow for six years, and withhold sowing during the seventh year, so that that you will know that the land is Mine...” [cf. “The land must not be sold beyond reclaim, for the land is Mine; you are strangers and foreigners with me. (Lev. 25:23)]

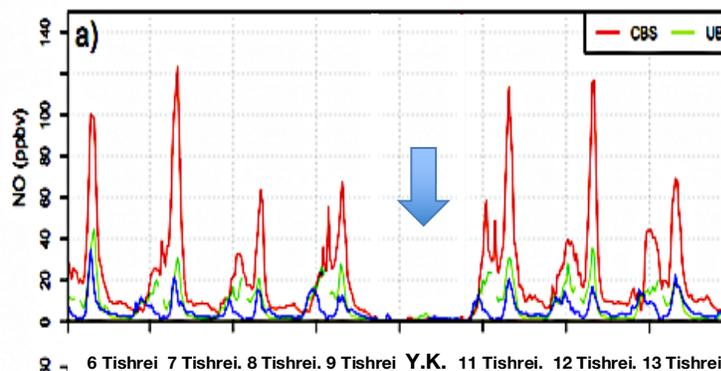
(Sanhedrin 39a)

3. Shabbat: Restraint Must Be Woven into Our Weekly Lives

שֵׁשֶׁת יָמִים תַּעֲבֹד וְעָשִׂיתָ כָּל־מְלַאכְתֶּךָ: וְלוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי שָׁבַת | לַה' אֱלֹקֶיךָ לֹא תַעֲשֶׂה כָּל־מְלַאכָה אַתָּה וּבִנְךָ יוֹבֵתְךָ וְעַבְדְּךָ וְאִמְתְּךָ וְשׁוֹרְךָ וַחֲמֹרְךָ וְכָל־בְּהֵמַתְךָ וְגֵרְךָ אֲשֶׁר בְּשַׁעְרֶיךָ לְמַעַן יָנוּחַ עַבְדְּךָ וְאִמְתְּךָ כָּמוֹךָ :

“Six days you shall labor and do all your work. But the seventh shall be a Sabbath to your God – you shall do no work, you, your son or daughter, your male or female slave, your ox or your donkey, or any of your cattle, or the stranger in your settlements – so that your male and female slave may rest as you do.

Nitric Oxide Emissions, Tel Aviv



This 2013 study shows daily pollution levels of nitric oxide (NO) in Tel Aviv during the week of Yom Kippur. (Nitric oxide, emitted by cars and industry, harms human health.) On Yom Kippur itself, “the Sabbath of Sabbaths,” many Israelis refrain from driving, and emissions plummet. Perhaps the profound, utopian vision of Shabbat and Yom Tov restraint can help repair our atmosphere.

(see Ilan Levy, “A national day with near zero emissions,” *Atmospheric Environment*, Vol. 77, 2013)



4. Bal Tashchit: We Cannot Be Reckless, Wasteful Consumers

כִּי־תִצּוֹר אֶל־עִיר יָמִים רַבִּים לְהִלָּחֵם עָלֶיהָ לְתַפְשֶׁהָ לֹא־תִשְׁחִית אֶת־עֵצֶיהָ לְנֹדֶחַ עָלֶיךָ גֵרְזִין כִּי מִמֶּנּוּ תֹאכַל וְאֵתוֹ לֹא תִכְרֹת כִּי הָאָדָם יַעַץ הַשָּׂדֶה לְבֹא מִפְּנֵיךָ בַּמִּצּוֹר:

When in your war against a city you have to besiege it a long time in order to capture it, you must not destroy its trees, wielding the ax against them. You may eat of them, but you must not cut them down. Are trees of the field human to withdraw before you into the besieged city? (Deuteronomy 20:19)

The United States wastes as much as 40% of its food each year, according to the [NRDC](#). The U.N. Food and Agriculture Organization ([FAO](#)) estimates that global food waste releases about 4.4 gigatons of carbon dioxide per year, nearly as much automobile emissions.

5. Immorality & Planetary Disaster are Intertwined

הַשְּׁמַרְוּ לָכֶם פֶּן יִפְתָּה לְבַבְכֶם וְסָרְתֶם וְעַבַדְתֶּם אֱלֹהִים אֲחֵרִים וְהִשְׁתַּחֲוִיתֶם לָהֶם: וְחָרָה אַפָּיִה בְּכֶם וְעָצַר אֶת־הַשָּׁמַיִם וְלֹא־יִהְיֶה מָטָר וְהִאֲדָמָה לֹא תִתֵּן אֶת־יְבוּלָהּ וְאֲבַדְתֶּם מִהָרָה מֵעַל הָאָרֶץ הַטֹּבָה אֲשֶׁר ה' נָתַן לָכֶם:

“Take care not to be lured away to serve other gods and prostrate to them. For God’s anger will flare up and He will stop up the heavens: there won’t be rain, the earth will not give forth its crops, and you will quickly perish from the good land that God gives you” (Deuteronomy 11:16-17)

6. The Supreme Value of Human Life

וּשְׁמַרְתֶּם אֶת־חֻקֹּתַי וְאֶת־מִשְׁפָּטַי אֲשֶׁר יַעֲשֶׂה אִתְּכֶם הָאָדָם וְחַי בָּהֶם

You shall keep My laws and My rules, by the pursuit of which a person **shall live**. (Leviticus 18:5; cf. Genesis 9:6, Sanhedrin 4:5)

Climate change is already killing. But the [WHO](#) estimates climate change-related deaths will reach 250,000 per year between 2030 and 2050, which some researchers have called a “conservative estimate.” Today, fossil fuel air pollution already causes as many as 3.6 million deaths per year worldwide, due to heart disease, asthma, cancer, etc. ([Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences](#), Feb. 2019).

