The Greening of Faith: Insights from Judaism, Islam, and Buddhism,
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The Greening of Faith

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Insights from Judaism, Islam, and Buddhism

Tobias Winright, editor

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CONTENTS

Introduction 1

Chapter 1—Judaism and the Care for God's Creation 2

Hava Tirosh-Samuelson

Introduction

The Principles of Jewish Environmental Ethics

The Sanctification of Nature in Rabbinic Judaism

Understanding God's Creation in Medieval Philosophy and Kabbalah

Nature and Renewal in Modern Jewish Thought

Contemporary Jewish Environmentalism

Chapter 2—Greater than the Creation of Mankind (*Qur'an* 40:57): Creation as the Divine Signature in *Qur'an*ic and Sufi Revelation 36

June-Ann Greeley

Introduction

Green Islam?

The *Qur'an* as the Primary Guide for Environmental Consciousness

Environmental Themes in the *Qur'an*

Chapter 3—Why Does the Buddha Close His Eyes in My Eden? A Buddhist Ecological Challenge and Invitation to Christians 56

David Clairmont

Introduction

Buddhist Views and Buddhist Worlds

The Buddha's Teaching on Nature and Ecological Ethics

The Buddha's Teaching on Creation and God(s)

Contemporary Buddhist Ecological Movements

Contributors 75

Index 76

INTRODUCTION

The chapters in this volume are excerpted from *Green Discipleship: Catholic Theological Ethics and the Environment* (© 2011, Anselm Academic), edited by Tobias Winright. The three chapters consider the "greening of faith" in three religions other than Christianity. *Nostra Aetate* (Declaration on the Relationship of the Church to Non-Christian Religions), from the Second Vatican Council, taught that the Catholic Church "rejects nothing which is true and holy" in other world religions, and it exhorted Catholics to "prudently and lovingly, through dialogue and collaboration with followers of other religions and in witness of Christian faith and life, acknowledge, preserve, and promote the spiritual and moral goods found among these [people], as well as the values in their society and culture."[1] In chapter 1, historian and Jewish studies professor Hava Tirosh-Samuelson canvasses, in addition to the Hebrew Bible, a wide range of literary sources in the history of Judaism that articulate deep ecological concerns that could inspire conservation policies and a distinctive Jewish ecotheology. In chapter 2, June-Ann Greeley introduces ecological conversation underway in Islam, especially centering on the *Qur'an*. And in chapter 3, David Clairmont examines early teachings that have been central to Buddhist approaches to moral problems, how these teachings relate to Buddhist interpretations of the natural world, and how Buddhist critiques about ideas of God and creation relate to Buddhist ecological teachings today.

1. *Nostra Aetate* (Declaration on the Relationship of the Church to Non-Christian Religions), in *The Documents of Vatican II*, ed. Walter M. Abbott, SJ (Piscataway, NJ: New Century Publishers, 1966), 662–63, no. 2.

CHAPTER 1

JUDAISM AND THE CARE FOR GOD'S CREATION

Hava Tirosh-Samuelson

KEY TERMS

Torah
rabbinic Judaism
Sukkot
festival of Tu B'shvat
Kabbalah
Hasidism
teshuvah
Eco-Kosher
Tikkun Olam

INTRODUCTION

The literary sources of Judaism—the Bible, the Mishnah, the Babylonian and Jerusalem Talmuds, Jewish philosophy, kabbalah and Hasidism, and modern Jewish thought—have much to say about the natural world and about humanity's obligation to care for God's creation. Although the Bible allows humans to use natural resources to benefit themselves, it sets specific limits on the use of natural resources, forbids wanton destruction, and spells out how to care for God's creatures. The concern for nature and respect for its inviolability characterize Jewish environmental ethics of responsibility, which sees a causal link between the moral and religious quality of human life and the well-being of the natural world. Throughout its long evolution under changing historical circumstances, the Jewish

tradition has articulated deep ecological concerns that could inspire conservation policies and a distinctive Jewish ecotheology.[1]

THE PRINCIPLES OF JEWISH ENVIRONMENTAL ETHICS

The Hebrew Bible is the literary evidence of ancient Israelite religion and the canonic scripture of Judaism. It also reflects the agrarian conditions of ancient Israel,[2] even though the priests and scribes who composed it were not themselves farmers. The biblical text came into existence in a complex editorial process that lasted several centuries (roughly from the seventh century BCE to the first century CE). During the Second Temple Period (516 BCE–70 CE), even though the Jerusalem Temple functioned as the political, spiritual, and administrative center of the Jewish people in the land of Israel, the Jews came to accept the Bible as their canonic text, regarding it as divinely revealed. Thus, the Bible shaped the collective identity and culture of the Jewish people through ongoing interpretation, adaptation, and application to changing historical circumstances.

The biblical narrative of creation is the basis of Jewish attitudes toward the natural world. The book of Genesis includes two creation narratives that present different, but not necessarily contradictory, views of the relationship between humanity and the natural world.[3] The first creation narrative (Genesis 1:1—2:3) depicts the creation

1. For overviews of Jewish attitudes toward the natural world, see Hava Tirosh-Samuelson, "Judaism," in *Oxford Handbook of Religion and Ecology*, ed. Roger S. Gottlieb (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 25–64; Hava Tirosh-Samuelson, "Judaism," in *Encyclopedia of Religion and Nature*, vol. 2 (London: Continuum, 2005), 525–537, and other related essays in that encyclopedia.

2. See Daniel Hillel, *The Natural History of the Bible* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006); Ellen E. Davis, *Scripture, Culture and Agriculture: An Agrarian Reading of the Bible* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009); Evan Eisenberg, *The Ecology of Eden* (New York: Knopf, 1998).

3. For a good analysis of the two creation narratives that teases out the ecological differences between them, see Theodore Hiebert, *The Yahwist's Landscape: Nature and Religion in Early Israel* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996). For the theological implications of the biblical creation myth that distinguishes Israelite religion from its neighboring cultures, consult Jon D. Levenson, *Creation and the Persistence of Evil: The Jewish Drama of Divine Omnipotence* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988).

of the material world as an act of ordering unordered chaos. This narrative sees creation as boundary formation, and it serves as the rationale for distinguishing the sacred and the profane, the permitted and the forbidden, such as clean and unclean foods, in the legal parts of the Bible and in postbiblical Judaism (see Leviticus 10:10–11; Leviticus 19; Deuteronomy 22:11).

In the first creation narrative, one animal, namely, the human, is presented as different from all others, because it was made in the "divine image" (*zelem elohim*) (see Genesis 1:26). By virtue of the divine image, the human receives the commandment to have dominion over other animals (see Genesis 1:28). The commandment clearly privileges the human species over others and calls the human to rule over other living creatures but does not give license to exploit Earth's resources, because Earth does not belong to humans but to God. The act of divine creation ends with rest on the seventh day, the Sabbath, imposing rest on nature.

The second creation narrative (Genesis 2:4—3:24) considers the origin of humanity through the Garden of Eden myth and highlights the link between the human earthling (*adam*) and the earth (*adamah*) from which the human comes and to which the human will return at death. God's breath transforms the earthling from the "dust of the earth" into a living being (*nefesh hayah*), thus establishing the direct link between humanity and God. This narrative places the human in the Garden of Eden "to serve and to keep it," or in a different translation "to till and protect it" (*le-ovdah u-leshomrah*), a command that implies farming activities such as tilling, plowing, and sowing, as well as the deep obligation toward the environment. This command is the basis of Jewish environmental ethics of responsibility that regards humans as stewards of nature, even though the term *stewards* does not appear in the Bible. The responsibility for the well-being of nonhuman creatures is manifested in broad legislation toward various aspects of nature.

Several land-based commandments in the Bible express the belief that "God is the rightful owner of the land of Israel and the source of its fertility; the Israelites working the land are but God's tenant-farmers who are obligated to return the first portion of the land's yield to its rightful owner in order to insure the land's

continuing fertility and the farmer's sustenance and prosperity."[4] Accordingly, the first sheaf of the barley harvest and the two loaves of bread made from the new grain are to be consecrated to God.[5] The Bible articulates extensive protection of vegetation, especially trees. Leviticus 19:23 commands that during the first three years of growth, the fruits of newly planted trees or vineyards are not to be eaten (*orlah*), because they are considered to be God's property. Fruit-bearing trees are to be protected in wartime and must not be chopped down while the city is under siege (see Deuteronomy 20:19). Scripture thus recognizes the interdependence between humans and trees, on the one hand, and the capacity of humans to destroy natural things, on the other.

Also, when Israel conducts itself according to the laws of the Torah, the land is abundant and fertile, benefiting its inhabitants with the basic necessities of life—grain, oil, and wine—but when Israel sins, the blessedness of the land declines, and it becomes desolate and inhospitable (see Deuteronomy 11:6–11). Thus, the well-being of God's land and the moral quality of the people who live on the land are causally linked and both dependent on obeying God's will.

The Bible recognizes the diversity of species (literally "kinds") in the natural world (see Genesis 1:11–25). Biblical legislation expresses concern over the protection of diversification, such as Leviticus 19:19: "You shall not let your cattle breed with a different kind; you shall not sow your field with two kinds of seeds" (repeated in Deuteronomy 22:9–11). The Bible prohibits mixing different species of plants, fruit trees, fish, birds, and land animals, a prohibition clarified and further elaborated by the rabbis.

Limiting human consumption of animals and regulating all food sources is a major concern of the Bible and the Holiness Code. The laws of Leviticus 11 and Deuteronomy 14 are part of an elaborate system of purity and impurity affecting the sanctuary and the

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4. Richard Sarrason, "The Significance of the Land of Israel in the Mishnah," in *The Land of Israel: Jewish Perspectives*, ed. Lawrence A. Hoffman (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press), 114.

5. On these and other agricultural commandments in the Bible, see Victor Raboy, "Jewish Agricultural Law: Ethical First Principles and Environmental Justice," in *Ecology & the Jewish Spirit: Where Nature & the Sacred Meet*, ed. Ellen Bernstein (Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights, 2000), 190–199.

priesthood, as well as the lives of individual Israelites.[6] In general, the Torah prohibits eating the meat of certain living creatures that are classified as impure or unclean, the ingestion of blood of any animals, the consumption of animal fat, and the eating of meat of the carcass of dead animals and fowls. The differentiation between clean and unclean animals, which is the core of Jewish dietary laws, has generated a lot of discussion about their internal logic. Some scholars explained that the unclean animals were those regarded as deities in neighboring cultures. Still others considered the means of locomotion as the crucial classificatory principle. However, the prohibition on consuming certain animals is also possible to explain as ecologically motivated.[7]

Animals (horse, mule, camel) that were domesticated could be kept by farmers for transportation and work on the field but not for consumption. The cow was used for work, milk, and meat, and the sheep and goat for milk and meat only. Water animals that could be eaten must have fins and scales (i.e., fish) but frogs, toads and newts were not to be eaten, perhaps because the authors of the Bible were aware that they benefit the ecosystem and control mosquitoes. Lobsters, oysters, and mussels are also forbidden, most likely because the coast of Palestine is not suited for them. All birds of prey, including owls, were forbidden for human consumption as well as all storks, ibises, herons, and species of bats. Once one realizes that many of the forbidden species were actually common in the land of Israel, it is possible to look at these prohibitions as extended protection of birds that are important to "maintaining the ecological equilibrium and serve as the most efficient control agents of species."[8]

Another deep ecological concern of the Bible is the perpetuation of life of nonhuman animals: "If you come on a bird's nest, in any tree or on the ground, with fledglings or eggs, with the mother sitting

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6. See Jan J. Boersma, *The Torah and the Stoics; On Humankind and Nature; A Contribution to the Debate on Sustainability and Quality* (Leiden, Boston, Köln: Brill Academic, 2001), 113–188; Bryan David, *Cosmos, Chaos and the Kosher Mentality* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1995).

7. This approach is the gist of Aloys Hüttermann, *The Ecological Message of the Torah: Knowledge, Concepts, and Laws Which Made Survival in a Land of "Milk and Honey" Possible* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1999).

8. Ibid, 76.

on the fledglings or on the eggs, you shall not take the mother with the young. Let the mother go, taking only the young for yourself, in order that it may go well with you and you may live long" (Deuteronomy 22:6–7). By saving the mother, the Torah enables the species to continue to reproduce and avoid potential extinction. In addition, cruelty toward animals is prohibited because it leads to other forms of cruelty.[9] The ideal is to create a sensibility of love and kindness toward animals to emulate God's attribute of mercy and fulfill the commandment "to be holy as I the Lord am holy" (Leviticus 19:2). Thus, in Deuteronomy 22:10, yoking an ass and an ox together is prohibited, because the uneven size could cause unnecessary suffering. The prohibition on "seething a kid in its mother's milk" (see Exodus 23:19; Exodus 34:26; Deuteronomy 14:21), which is the basis for an elaborate system of ritual separation of milk and meat products in rabbinic Judaism, is explained by the rabbis as an attempt to prevent cruelty in humans (*Deuteronomy Rabbah* 6.10). While Scripture does not forbid slaughtering animals for consumption or sacrifice or using eggs for human use, it curtails excess cruelty. Kindness to animals is a virtue of the righteous person, which is associated with the promise of heavenly rewards (see Proverbs 12:10).

The most distinctive feature of Jewish environmental legislation is the causal connection between the moral quality of human life and the vitality of God's creation. The corruption of society is closely linked to the corruption of nature. In both cases, the injustice arises from human greed and the failure of humans to protect the original order of creation. From the Jewish perspective, the just allocation of nature's resources is a religious issue of the highest order. The treatment of the marginal in society—the poor, the hungry, the widow, the orphan—must follow the principle of scriptural legislation. Thus, parts of the land's produce—the corner of the field, the gleaning of stalks, the forgotten sheaf, the separated fruits, and the defective cluster—are to be given to those who do not own land. By observing the particular commandments, the soil itself becomes holy, and the person who obeys these commandments ensures the religiomoral purity necessary to live in God's land. A failure to treat

9. See Ze'ev Levy, "Ethical Issues of Animal Welfare in Jewish Thought," *Judaism: A Quarterly Journal* 45 (1996), 45–57.

other members of the society justly, so as to protect the sanctity of their lives, is integrally tied to acts extended toward the land. This aspect of Jewish ecological ethics is the foundation of the concept of "Eco-Kosher" promoted by contemporary Jewish environmentalists, as shown below.

The connection between land management, rituals, and social justice is most evident in the laws regulating the sabbatical year (*shemittah*).[10] The sabbatical year is an extension of the laws of the Sabbath to Earth. On the Sabbath, humans create nothing, destroy nothing, and enjoy the bounty of Earth. As God rested on the seventh day, the Sabbath is viewed as the completion of the act of creation, a celebration of human tenancy and stewardship. The Sabbath teaches that humans stand not only in relation to nature but also in relation to the creator of nature. Most instructively, domestic animals are included in the Sabbath rest (see Deuteronomy 5:13–14). Specific cases exist in which it is permissible to violate the laws of the Sabbath to help an animal in distress. Thus, one must alleviate the suffering of an animal that has fallen into a cistern or ditch on the Sabbath, to bring food or pillows and blankets to help it climb free. The normal restrictions against such labors on the Sabbath are waived. Cattle must be milked and geese fed, lest the buildup of milk in the cow or hunger in the geese cause suffering to a living being. The observance of the Sabbath is a constant reminder of the deepest ethical and religious values that enable Jews to stand in a proper relationship with God.

During the sabbatical year, it is forbidden to plant, cultivate, or harvest grain, fruit, or vegetables or even to plant in the sixth year to harvest during the seventh year. Crops that grow untended are not to be harvested by the landlord but are to be left ownerless (*hefqer*) for all to share, including poor people and animals. The

10. For discussion of the laws of the sabbatical year, consult Shlomo Riskin, "Shemitta: A Sabbatical for the Land; The Land Will Rest and the People Will Grow," in *Judaism and Ecology*, ed. Aubrey Rose (London: Cassell, 1992), 70–73; Gerald Blidstein, "Man and Nature in the Sabbatical Year," *Tradition: A Journal of Orthodox Thought* 8 (1996): 48–55. On modern attempts to live by the laws of the Sabbatical year, see Benjamin Bak, "The Sabbatical Year in Modern Israel," *Tradition* 1, no. 2 (1959), 193–199. For reflections on the theological relevance of biblical legislation today, see Arthur Waskow, "From Compassion to Jubilee," *Tikkun Magazine* 5, no. 2 (1990), 78–81.

rest imposed during the sabbatical year helps restore nutrients and improves the soil, promotes diversity in plant life, and helps maintain vigorous cultivars. On the seventh year, debts contracted by fellow Israelites are to be remitted (see Leviticus 25; Deuteronomy 15:3), providing temporary relief from these obligations. In the Jubilee year, all Hebrew slaves are manumitted, regardless of when they were acquired (see Leviticus 25:39–41), to teach that slavery is not a natural state.

The laws of the sabbatical years were practically reversed in the rabbinic period when a written document (*prozbul*) assigned the debt to the court before the sabbatical year with the intention of collecting the debt at a later time. This reinterpretation indicates the broad transformation of ancient Israelite religion especially after the destruction of the Second Temple and the emergence of rabbinic Judaism.

THE SANCTIFICATION OF NATURE IN RABBINIC JUDAISM

The rabbis elaborated and expanded many biblical laws, including laws concerning the land, its flora and fauna, claiming the status of oral Torah to their legal deliberations. Together the written Torah and the oral Torah constituted the ideal way of life that all Jews should follow. By 600 CE, the Judaism of the rabbis would become normative so that to be Jewish meant to live the Torah as interpreted by the rabbis.[11] Rabbinic Judaism created a religious system aimed at making Jews holy as God is holy outside the precincts of the Jerusalem Temple and even without the Temple altogether. All aspects of life—space, time, the human body, and human relations—were sanctified by following a prescribed and all-encompassing way of life. These prescriptions, or commandments (*mitzvot*), capture the creative tension between nature and Torah in rabbinic Judaism. On the

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11. The logic of rabbinic Judaism is best explained by the numerous writings of Jacob Neusner, including *The Way of Torah: An Introduction to Judaism,* 5th ed. (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 1993). Neusner insightfully speaks about the "ecology of Judaism," a phrase that highlights the intrinsic connection between the Jews and their natural environment.

one hand, the sacred texts as interpreted by the rabbis specify normative behavior, ethical values, and social ideals that shaped all aspects of Jewish life, including attitudes toward the natural world. On the other hand, the veneration of and dedication to the Torah caused the distancing of religious Jews from the natural world. Because studying Torah was presented as the most important commandment, equivalent in worth to all other commandments combined, a rabbinic text declared that Scripture regards the one who stops Torah study to appreciate the beauty of nature "as if he forfeited his soul" (Mishna, Tractate Avot 3.7).[12] Precisely because rabbinic Judaism placed Torah at the center of Jewish life, rabbinic Jews would experience the natural world through the prism of Torah.

Rabbinic Judaism posed an elaborate program for the sanctification of nature through observance of divine commandments.[13] In daily prayers, the Jewish worshipper sanctifies nature by expressing gratitude to the Creator "who in his goodness creates each day." The prayers recognized the daily changes in the rhythm of nature—morning, evening, and night—and recognized the power of God to bring about changes. Similarly, when Jews witness natural phenomena such as a storm or a tree blossoming, they are obligated to say a blessing that bears witness to God's power in nature. The observant Jew blesses God for the natural functions of the human body and for the food that God provides to nourish the human body. Through such blessings, acts from which the worshipper derives either benefit or pleasure are consecrated to God. To act otherwise is a form of theft (Tosefta, tractate Berakhot 6.3).

An example of the sanctification of nature in rabbinic Judaism can be seen in the festival of Sukkot (Tabernacles). Originally celebrated at the end of the summer harvest and the preparation for the rainy season in the land of Israel, Sukkot was associated with the redemption of Israel from Egypt (see Leviticus 23:24). Removed from the protection of their regular dwelling, the Israelites had

12. For analysis of this rabbinic text that attempts to overcome the tension, see Jeremy Benstein, "'One, Walking and Studying . . . ': Nature vs. Torah," *Judaism: A Quarterly Journal* 44 (1991–92), 25–35.

13. Michael Wyschogrod, "Judaism and the Sanctification of Nature," *The Melton Journal* 24 (Spring 1991), 5–7.

wandered in the desert, forced to live in temporary dwellings (the Hebrew *sukkah* [plural, *sukkot*] refers to this booth). Life in a *sukkah* compelled the Israelites to experience the power of God in nature more directly and become even more grateful to God's power of deliverance. In addition to dwelling in a *sukkah*, the Israelites were commanded to "take the fruit of majestic trees, branches of palm trees, boughs of leafy trees, and willows of the brook; and . . . [to] rejoice before the LORD your God for seven days" (Leviticus 23:40). In this manner, nature became a means for Israel's fulfillment of the commandment to rejoice before God.[14] After the destruction of the Temple, the complex ritual of this pilgrimage festival could no longer be carried out in the Temple. Hence, the rabbis elaborated the symbolic meaning of the *sukkah*, viewing it as a sacred home and the locus for the divine presence.

Another Jewish festival also celebrated the ritual transformation of nature. First mentioned in the Mishnah (Rosh Hashanah 1.1), the fifteenth day of the month of Shevat, which coincides with the beginning of bloom of almond trees after the period of dormancy during winter, was celebrated as "the new year for trees."[15] The celebration apparently originated in the secular activity of paying taxes on fruit trees, but it received a religious meaning when the day was interpreted as God's judgment of trees, analogous to the judgment of people at the beginning of the Jewish year. During the Middle Ages, when the Jews no longer dwelled in the land of Israel, the festival assumed a new symbolic meaning, with new prayers and new customs. Fruits grown in the land of Israel were eaten by Diaspora Jews, and a special set of Psalms was added to the daily liturgy. The most elaborate ritual for the holiday was constructed by kabbalists in the sixteenth century, for whom the land of Israel was no longer merely a

14. On the history of this festival and the symbolism of its rituals, consult Jeffrey L. Rubinstein, *The History of Sukkot in the Second Temple and Rabbinic Periods* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1995); and "The Symbolism of the Sukkah," *Judaism* 43 (1994), 371–387. On the significance of Sukkot for Jewish environmentalism, see "Sukkot: A Holiday of Joy," in *Ecology & the Jewish Spirit: Where Nature and the Sacred Meet*, ed. Ellen Bernstein (Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights, 2000), 133–136.

15. For more on the history, significance, and transformation of the festival of Tu B'Shvat, consult Ari Elon, Naomi Mara Hyman, and Arthur Waskow, eds., *Trees, Earth and Torah: A Tu B'Shvat Anthology* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 2000).

physical place but also a spiritual reality. Modeled after the Passover service, the kabbalistic ritual for the "new year for trees" endowed it with the capacity to restore the flow of divine energy to the broken world. The very fact that, for the kabbalists, everything in the world was a symbol of divine reality facilitated the creation of new rituals and endowed natural objects with a new spiritual meaning. Thus, nature was absorbed into the sacred narrative of Judaism. In modern times the festival of Tu B'shvat was revived in the State of Israel but with no reference to its religious meaning; instead, the festival was used to launch massive efforts of reforestation. By contrast, in North America, Jewish environmentalists in recent years have revived the kabbalistic ritual with its symbolic meanings to allow Jews to invest emotionally with the ecologically significant ancient practice.

In their attempt to create a holy society, the rabbis elaborated biblical ecological legislation though the Temple no longer existed. For example, the rabbis decreed that gifts to God are to be made only from produce grown by Israelites in the land of Israel, in contrast to all other cereal and animal offerings, which may be brought to the Temple also from outside the land (Mishnah Men 8:1; Mishna Parah 2:1). Some of the consecrated produce is to be given to the priests and Levites, whereas other produce is to be eaten by the farmer. Similarly, the rabbis elaborated on the biblical prohibition against mixing of species in Mishnah, Tractate Kil'ayim and in the Palestinian Talmud on that tractate. While rabbinic rulings about the main grains of the land of Israel—wheat, rye grass, barley, oats, and spelt—and about other species of vegetation do not indicate that the rabbis understood the principles of genetic engineering, it does suggest they were keen observers of the natural world and they respected diversification of nature.

The biblical prohibition on the cutting down of fruit-bearing trees during time of war (see Deuteronomy 20:19) was generalized by the rabbinic sages into the general prohibition against all forms of destruction, complete or incomplete, direct or indirect, of all objects that may be potential benefit to humans.[16] By invoking the principle of "do not destroy," the rabbis prohibited cutting off water supply

16. Eilon Schwartz, "*Bal Tashchit:* A Jewish Environmental Precept," *Environmental Ethics* 19 (1997), 355–74.

to trees; overgrazing the countryside; unjustified killing of animals or feeding them harmful foods; hunting animals for sport; species extinction and the destruction of cultivated plant varieties; pollution of air and water; overconsumption of anything; and the waste of mineral and other resources. These environmental regulations indicate that the Jewish legal tradition requires that one carefully weigh the ramifications of all actions and behavior for every interaction with the natural world; it also sets priorities and weighs conflicting interests and permanent modification of the environment.

The rabbis further extended the ethics of care by closely attending to the needs of animals.[17] On the basis of Deuteronomy 22:6, which forbids the killing of a bird with her young because it is exceptionally cruel, the rabbis articulated the general principle of *tza`ar ba`aley hayyim* (literally "distress of living creatures") that prohibits the affliction of needless suffering on animals. The rabbis considered this particular commandment one of seven commandments given to the sons of Noah and, therefore, binding on all humans, not just on Jews. The obligation to release the ass from its burden (Exodus 23:5), that is, to assist the owner in unloading merchandise or materials by a beast of burden and a similar obligation to come to the assistance of a fallen animal (see Deuteronomy 22:4) are understood by rabbinic sources (BT Baba Metzi`a 32b) as duties rooted in the concern for the financial loss that would be suffered by the animal's master were the animal to collapse under the weight of the burden. Although generally human needs take precedence over the suffering of animals, there are cases in which the rabbis privilege the needs of animals. Thus, Deuteronomy 1:15 is understood in rabbinic exegesis as forbidding a person to partake of any food unless one has first fed one's animal (BT Berakhot 41a; Gittin 62a). Similarly, one is permitted to buy animals only after one can assure that the animals could be fed (Yerushalmi, Yebamot 15:3; Ketubot 4:8).

The concern for future generations of nonhuman species is elaborated in *Deuteronomy Rabbah* 6.5, Babylonian Talmud, Tractate

17. Elijah Shochet, *Animal Life in Jewish Tradition: Attitudes and Relationships* (New York: KTAV, 1984); Noah J. Cohen, *Tza'ar Ba'ale Hayim: The Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, Its Bases, Development, and Legislation in Hebrew Literature*, 2nd ed. (New York: Feldheim, 1976).

Hullin 138b-42a, and *Sifre Deuteronomy* 2.27, specifying that the person who finds the nest is allowed to take the nestlings only if they are not fledged. Such concern intimates a notion of sustained use of resources and could provide Jewish support for the concept of sustainability. This reasoning led the rabbis to prohibit raising sheep and goats that graze, even though the rabbis were aware these animals generated a profitable business in the Roman Empire (Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Hullin 58b). The ban was imposed after the devastation of Judea in the Bar Kokhba revolt (132–135 CE) to enable the land to heal from the devastation of the war: thus short-term hardship was traded with long-term gains. This kind of environmental legislation was legitimated by appeal to the holiness of the land, but it also indicates attention to the particular physical conditions.

Although the rabbis speculated about the origin of the universe and reflected on the order of creation in Genesis, they were mainly concerned about nature as a source for moral lessons. For example, the Talmud notes that if the Torah did not prescribe certain virtues, Israel would have learned honesty from the ant, modesty from the cat, chastity from the dove, and loyalty from the cock (BT Erubin 100b). Conversely, some animals exemplify vices that humans must avoid. Anecdotes about individual rabbinic figures depict them either as observers of natural phenomena (e.g., Rabbi Shimon ben Halfta) or as people who have special sensitivity to their domestic animals (e.g., Rabbi Pinchas ben Yair). By parables and fables in which animals are employed allegorically, the rabbis inculcated their ethical outlook and the virtues they sought to cultivate in humans, especially modesty, self-control, and prudence.

The purpose of rabbinic legislation was to cultivate the upright moral personality that could stand in a relationship with God. On the one hand, the rabbinic interpretation of Scripture specified normative behavior, ethical values, and social ideals that shaped Jewish attitude toward nature, but, on the other hand, the dedication to Torah study distanced rabbinic Jews from the natural world. The Torah was believed to be the paradigm that God had consulted when creating the world. To know how God wishes Jews to behave, they must consult the Torah. Thus the sacred text and its ongoing interpretation both sanctified the natural world and called on Jews to

aspire to transcend nature and its demands on humans. This is why rabbinic Judaism could be said to give rise to the "unnatural Jew."[18] The more Jews lived in accordance to the religious prescriptions of the rabbinic tradition, the less they were interested in the natural world for its own sake.

UNDERSTANDING GOD'S CREATION IN MEDIEVAL PHILOSOPHY AND KABBALAH

What does it mean for the Torah to be the paradigm of the created world? During the Middle Ages, two Jewish schools of thought addressed the question: rationalist philosophy and theosophic kabbalah. These intellectual programs presented themselves as the correct interpretation of the Bible, and they theorized about nature in their attempt to specify the relationship among creation, revelation, and redemption. As ideal paths for religious perfection, rationalist philosophy and theosophic kabbalah flourished simultaneously from the twelfth to the sixteenth centuries, cross-fertilizing each other.[19] Though each school of thought developed distinct conceptions of the natural world, it is only in these sources that the term *nature* (*teva*) appears as an abstract concept. In rabbinic sources, by contrast, the natural world is referred to only as "*beriah*," namely, *creation*. Thus, to speak about creation in Judaism is inherently ambiguous because the term *creation* denotes both the act of bringing the world into existence, as well as the outcome of the act: the physical world in its totality.

Rationalist Jewish philosophers—chief among them Moses Maimonides (1138–1204)—speculated about the origin of the world, viz., whether the world is created out of nothing or out of

18. Steven S. Schwarzschild, "The Unnatural Jew," *Environmental Ethics* 6 (1984), 347–362.

19. On the relationship between philosophy and kabbalah, see Hava Tirosh-Samuelson, "Philosophy and Kabbalah, 1200–1600," in *Cambridge Companion of Medieval Jewish Medieval Philosophy*, eds. Daniel H. Frank and Oliver Leaman (Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 2003), 218–257. On philosophy and kabbalah as programs for the attainment of religious perfection, see Hava Tirosh-Samuelson, *Happiness in Premodern Judaism: Virtue, Knowledge, and Well-Being* (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 2003).