

EXPLORING OUR RESPONSIBILITY FOR EARTH’S RESOURCES: SHAPING AN ECO-ETHICOLOGICAL¹ APPROACH FOR DISCUSSION

by
Elliot Klayman

[E]very sprout and leaf says something meaningful, every stone whispers some hidden message in the silence – every creation sings its song. — Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook²

I. INTRODUCTION: BUILDING BLOCKS

We begin our journey toward an understanding of cosmogony and our responsibility for the Earth, supported by ethics mined from Scripture. Since it is God who put this world in motion, *tikkun olam* (repair of the world) would appear to be His ultimate responsibility. But it would be crass on our part to default by placing the whole onus on God to care for this real estate that He has so graciously bequeathed to us. He made Man and Woman “in his image” and crowned them with His glory. He filled the earth with a wealth of resources, placed us in the Garden, and commanded us to be fruitful and multiply and tend to the garden-earth. This locks us into a shared responsibility³ with God, in the maintenance and supervision of earth’s environment.

We continue our journey in search of a Messianic Jewish theology for our role and ethical responsibility for the created order by first looking generally at various world views of creation – Scientific, Ancient Hebrew, Christian, and Jewish – in hopes that we may extrapolate relevant *building blocks* for shaping a eco-ethicological conversation tied to that responsibility. Then by employing a metaphor derived from three pillars of Judaism, we construct a house⁴ of prayer,

¹ This “coined” term eco-ethicological brings together theology, ecology and ethics in a holistic endeavor.

² Quoted in David Sears, *Ecology and Spirituality in Jewish Tradition*, http://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/255515/jewish/Ecology-and-Spirituality-in-Jewish-Tradition.htm.

³ Paul Saal, “Origins and Destiny: Israel, Creation and the Messianic Jewish Canonical Narrative” (Hashivenu Forum IV), 2002, http://www.hashivenu.org/index.php?option=com_docman&task=cat_view&gid=63&Itemid=268 refers to our role as a “junior partnership.” (last accessed November 29, 2013).

⁴ This metaphorical construction was inspired by last year’s Hashivenu paper, Russ Resnik, “An Ethical Window: Framing a Messianic Jewish moral perspective,” in *First Steps in Messianic Jewish Ethics: Defining Our Involvement with One Another and the World About Us* (Hashivenu, 2013), 9-25, which began our house with a window, and a window sill representing Torah. Ibid., 12-14.

study and loving-kindness designed to inform, justify and activate our responsibility. The paper tentatively concludes that our Messianic Jewish communities ought to imitate God, and in partnership with Him distribute earth's resources to the needy, and thereby defeat chaos and restore order by blessing the "other."

A. SCIENTIFIC WORLD-VIEW

The widespread scientific view of God is that He does not exist but is only a rationale for the laws of physics. This world-view posits a belief that physical laws operating over time generated intelligent humans who now approach comprehending the cosmos. In their widely acclaimed book, *The Grand Design*,⁵ Stephen Hawking and Leonard Mlodinow seek to answer the question of life:

. . . M-theory predicts that a great many universes were created out of nothing. Their creation does not require the intervention of some supernatural being or god. Rather, these multiple universes arise naturally from physical law. . . . Although we are puny and insignificant on the scale of the cosmos, this makes us in a sense the lords of creation.⁶

The authors posit that all arose from nothing, producing a complex admixture of physical phenomena as antimatter, black holes, electromagnetic force, quantum and string physics, quarks, and weak and strong nuclear forces — principles that govern our universe. They discount God and place humans on the "throne," whose central purpose is to discover the marvels of our world. From the "big bang" 13.7 billion years ago scientific laws eventuated in this planet chocked full of life with its destiny dependent upon earthlings' actions. Mlodinow and Hawking exalt the human spirit, at God's expense:

The fact that we human beings . . . have been able to come this close to an understanding of the laws governing us and our universe is a great triumph. . . . If the theory is confirmed . . . it

⁵ Stephen Hawking & Leonard Mlodinow, *The Grand Design* (New York: Bantam Books, 2012).

⁶ *Ibid.*, 8-9. Thus, according to Hawkins and Mlodinow "[i]t is not necessary to invoke God to light the blue touch paper and set the universe going." *Ibid.*, 80.

will be the successful conclusion of a search going back more than 3000 years. We will have found the grand design.⁷

For Hawkins and Mlodinow the great triumph is humankind's conquest of the knowledge of Creation and the Grand Designer – science. This anthropomorphic-centricism makes Us alone responsible for the world at large, within the bounded limits of the laws of science.

Then there is the “God particle” find by Peter W. Higgs and Francois Englert.⁸ According to this theory, there is a particle called “Higgs boson” that holds the universe together. “The universe brims with energy that acts like a cosmic molasses, imbuing the particles that move through it with mass”⁹ This Higgs boson field insures that atoms and sub-atomic particles are “held together” in an artistic-type symmetrical tapestry mass, thus sounding a lot like Colossians 1:17, “by Him all things consist.”¹⁰

The scientific view fills in the lacunae in humankind's quest for understanding our environment and our being, in terms of physical principles. Laws of gravitation and magnetism, velocity and energy, waves and particles, go a long way to explain natural phenomena that we observe, and to advance our understanding of the physical universe. None of them, however, explain the “first cause,” but only wind up posing more questions.

For the scientist who has lived by his faith in the power of reason, the story ends like a bad dream. He has scaled the mountains of ignorance; he is about to conquer the highest peak; as he pulls himself over the highest peak; as he pulls himself over the final rock, he is greeted by a band of theologians who have been sitting there for centuries.¹¹

The popular view is further hyper-focused on evolution as the vehicle that ultimately drove us into existence. Darwin's evolutionary theory compounded with new genetic findings (neo-

⁷ Ibid., 181.

⁸ <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/10/09/science/englert-and-higgs-win-nobel-physics-prize.html?pagewanted=1> (last accessed October 13, 2013); http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Higgs_boson (last accessed October 13, 2013).

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ As science progresses it appears to confirm the biblical account of creation. See generally Yosef Britton, *Awesome Creation: A Study of the First Three Verses of the Torah* (Springfield, NJ: Gefen Books, 2013).

¹¹ Robert Jastrow, *God and the Astronomers* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1992), 104-07.

Darwinism) is one riveted with “giant leaps.”¹² Evolution removes God from the center and places randomness in the forefront. According to proponents, evolution produced the diversity of vegetation, and animals, including homo-sapiens, that exist on planet earth. Thus, for the blanket of vegetation covering the planet, the plentitudes of fish in the waters, the soaring birds in the sky, the variety of animal species, and humans, mutation over time has been the stroke of creative diversity, painted by chance. This view, of course, lacks a core non-negotiable for our community. Yet, it does heighten our marvel of the creation and its diverse resources, capturing our awe of the magnificence of the Creator. Our view may be further shaped by comparing the ancient Greek and Hebrew mind-sets.

B. ANCIENT HEBREW WORLD-VIEW

The ancient Hebrew world-view presents a stark contrast to the ancient Greek world-view. Rabbi Moses ben Maimon (Rambam) sought to reconcile them in his writings, especially in his *Guide to the Perplexed*. Steeped in Greek philosophy, which had seeped into Arabic (the *lingua franca* of the Muslim world), through the translation of Greek philosophical works, Rambam embraced the rationality and logic of it. He also wore a Rabbi’s *kippah*, and thereby sometimes faced irresolvable conflict between Hellenistic and Rabbinic views.

The classical Greeks believed that the world was eternal from the beginning and it would continue in eternity. This confronted Rambam with a dilemma because Genesis 1:1 starts with

¹² The scientific community continues to cast much doubt on the modern theory of Darwinism, which is rooted in DNA transmittal of information, mutation and natural selection. A key problem with the theory is that it fails to explain the “source of novel variation without which natural selection can do nothing” Simply, evolution does not explain how new information is transmitted to create “new body plans . . . complex structures and systems such as wings, feathers, eyes echolocation, blood clotting, molecular machines, the amniotic egg, skin, nervous systems, and multicellularity, to name just a few.” Stephen C. Meyer, *Darwin’s Doubt: The Explosive Origin of Animal Life and the Case for Intelligent Design* (New York: HarperCollins, 2013), ix. Darwin voiced his own doubt about the explanation of the “Cambrian explosion;” the fossil record showed a large number of animals with no pre-Cambrian fossil support for the transitional evolutionary build-up. *Ibid.*, 26-97. Finally, although genetics might explain micro-evolution within species, for example, the changing coloration of moths, immunity build-up in bacteria against antibiotics, and changes in the size of finch beaks, it cannot explain the larger leaps of the origin of new body plans or the Cambrian explosion. *Ibid.*, 286.

earth's beginning, and hence there was no earth before the beginning. It is here that Rambam shed his philosophical hat and donned his rabbinic *kippah*, opting for the *ex nihilo* biblical view of creation over the Greek view of eternal pre-existence.¹³ Although much cultural symbiosis existed between the Muslim and Jew in the medieval world, conflicts in philosophy, and theology were real, with contrasts rampant between Torah and Aristotelian thought, science and faith¹⁴

Semitic thought tends to be integrative, holistic, dynamic, connected and communal as opposed to Greek thought which tends to be compartmentalized, divided, static, individualized and solitary.¹⁵ The Greek-minded tend to be more self-contemplative, while the Semitic-minded tend toward outward service activity. Simply, when we put on our Semitic robes we are going to be “doers of the word and not hearers only.” We will be motivated to make a difference in the world because we see ourselves as part of it. Unlike the “flat earth” undifferentiated universalistic world of the Greeks, with race-less, homogenous attributes, the Semitic outlook embraces a particularistic understanding of the universe and its components, with covenant and race and peoples of all sorts, diverse in their personhood, attributes, and callings. The classical Hebrew values an organic continuity with the past and a shared destiny as a people of God, one who is more relational than creedal, who reacts more to situations than propositions, a people of ethical action versus logical indecision. Those who aspire to a Semitic-minded continuity,

¹³ For a fascinating discussion of the Greek view of eternity of the universe and the Biblical view of Creation, and Aristotle versus Maimonides, see Britton, 3-26.

¹⁴ Judah Halevy, who lived a bit earlier than Rambam, wrote perhaps the greatest of all Jewish philosophical pieces of his time, in the Kuzari. This work sought to prove that Judaism was superior to philosophy, Christianity and Islam. The Biblical prophet speaking Hebrew in the Land was superior to all. For a sampling of the Kuzari see <http://www.shechem.org/torah/kuzari/> (last accessed November 16, 2013).

¹⁵ When John F. Kennedy in a famous speech said: “Ask not what your country can do for you, but ask what you can do for your country” it stuck, because it was so foreign to American values of individualism, Dorff, 19, inherited from the Enlightenment and American ruggedness, where the individual was paramount. Here he was calling for a new orientation where individuals would lose their individualism and give to the public through government service. This is consistent with the Semitic mind-set and antithetical to the Greek mind-set.

embrace present responsibility over procrastinating rationale. They seek to move with right-minded ethical action consistent with a shared Hebrew heritage. This is a biblically-based ethical model supported by our “genetic” historic “covenant calling” and indicative of a cruciform future, a people moved by a set of objective communal-based ethical criteria suitable for the situation, for the sake of making this a better world by relieving the pain and suffering of the “other.” This mind-set perceives the cosmos holistically.¹⁶ Like Abraham was a hospitable host,¹⁷ we embrace this heritage, as we constantly “remember [we] were slaves in Egypt,” a very inhospitable environment that we seek to reverse for humanity. In search of a lens through which we may embrace a theological prism of eco-ethicological action in relation to our world and consistent with the mind of our Creator, we hope to gather some further wisdom on the topic from an enlightened Christian view-point.¹⁸

C. CHRISTIAN WORLD-VIEWS

Christian views are diverse when it comes to the environment and our role to play in relation to the cosmos. It is from “this world will pass away with a great noise and the elements will melt within it with fervent heat,” and thus no need to pamper or prolong it, to “God created the heavens and the earth and placed man in the garden to tend to it,” thus creating a need to be environmentally aware and active.¹⁹ Although we cannot categorize the Christian view of the shape of eco-ethicology, we can readily observe that the standard Christian canonical model is incompatible with our Messianic Jewish world-view. It simply lacks a biblically nuanced distinctiveness for the Jewish people.

¹⁶ See <http://www.jewcology.com> (last accessed November 26, 2013).

¹⁷ David Rudolph, “Hospitality Man” in *Kesher* 21 (Summer/Fall 2006): 1-6.

¹⁸ I am particularly indebted to Dr. John Fischer for some of the material in this topic comparing the Greek and Semitic mind-sets, derived from his lecture in “The Gospels Against their Jewish Background,” taught at St Petersburg Seminary and Yeshiva.

¹⁹ See Appendix A for four contrasting viewpoints on the believer’s responsibility for the environment.

R. Kendall Soulen analyzes the traditional shape of Christian theology through the lens of the storied account of the standard canonical narrative,²⁰ which claims that “[t]he God of Israel has acted in Jesus Christ for all the world.”²¹ As unpacked, it asserts that (1) God as Consummator created Adam and Eve to bring them into eternal life. (2) However, God’s work was thwarted when Adam and Eve fell, thereby unleashing the destructive powers of sin, death and evil. (3) God then engaged humankind as Redeemer through His Son in order to rescue humanity from the consequence of the Fall and (4) to fulfill God’s original purpose of consummating creation.²²

The problem with the standard narrative through Soulen’s scrutiny is that it discounts the primacy of the role of Israel, and thus, God’s identification with Israel.²³ Any understanding that Israel is prominent throughout, and upon whom the nations must depend for blessing, is largely suppressed.²⁴ The standard canonical model decentralizes the Hebrew Bible and Israel, leaving only a “prophetic” instrumental appendage that disappears upon the advent of Yeshua. The result is a supersessionism that is fused to a narrative,²⁵ which moves at “blinding speed” across millennia of history, skipping from Genesis 1-3 to the Apostolic Witness, a kind of “implicit” Marcionism.²⁶ This giant leap hurdles over Genesis 12:3 and its progeny, quickly introducing Jesus as Redeemer, thereby snubbing the essential role God gives to Israel, which is fundamental in the consummation purpose of God’s economy of mutual blessings in the company of the “other.”

²⁰ R. Kendall Soulen, *The God of Israel and Christian Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), 13.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 19.

²² On the Redemptive prong of the narrative, according to Soulen, God initiated salvation in Jesus by prophetic and definitive forms, with the prophetic spanning from Abraham to Incarnation, and the definitive, from Incarnation to the Judgment. *Ibid.*, 15.

²³ *Ibid.*, 16, 31.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 17.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 30-31.

²⁶ Marcion, a second century gnostic, eliminated the Hebrew Scriptures from his reconstructed Bible, and sought to strip the New Testament of its Jewish thrust.

Soulen re-designs the understanding of this flawed canonical narrative: “God’s history with Israel and the nations is the permanent and enduring medium of God’s work as the Consummator of human creation, and therefore it is also the permanent and enduring context of the gospel about Jesus.”²⁷ He expands this “nutshell” narrative by defining the economy of consummation as “God’s providential management of and care for the households of creation.”²⁸ By recognizing from the beginning (before sin and redemption) God’s desire to impart the consequences of mutual blessings of the various groupings, including male and female, parents, siblings, children, generations, Jews and Gentiles,²⁹ Soulen highlights Israel as the One whom God chose as the catalyst, and upon whom the “families” of the earth depend, for mutual economy of blessings.³⁰ This supports a good-sense reading of Scripture, thus rendering null supersessionism and associated unbiblical hermeneutics, in one fell swoop.³¹ God’s focus then from the beginning initiates Israel as the instrument to fulfill God’s economy of mutual blessings among the families of the earth, à la “in thee all families of the earth shall be blessed.”³²

Finally, Soulen recasts the Apostolic Witness as “good news,”³³ as it looks toward an eschatological *shalom* kingdom.³⁴ This future kingdom ties back to God as Consummator who through Yeshua’s life, death and resurrection defeats the forces antagonistic to the fullness of the economy of mutual dependency and blessings of Israel and the Nations.³⁵ Because of God’s triumph to come, Soulen urges us to live out a proleptic life in conformity to what the kingdom will look like in the final victory over the evil interference with God’s mutual economy of

²⁷ Soulen, 110.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid., 118; see also Daniel C. Juster, *Mutual Blessings: Discovering the Ultimate Destiny of Creation* (Clarksville, MD: Lederer Books, 2013), who elaborates in detail on the “mutuality of blessings.”

³⁰ Soulen, 125.

³¹ Ibid., 111.

³² Ibid., 114, 121.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid., 130-31, 141.

³⁵ Ibid., 158.

blessings, facilitated by Israel's central catalytic purpose. Now perhaps we are well on our way to deriving our biblical responsibility for this dusty dying world that God created for our enjoyment and pleasure, but not just for "us," but for "others" as well, by translating Soulen's approach to blessing "others" through the redistribution of natural earthly elements. But not before we appropriate portions of some Jewish world-views.

D. JEWISH WORLD-VIEWS

Rabbinicism and Kabbalism seem to be the profitable Jewish world-views to plumb as we gather fodder for our construction of a Messianic Jewish eco-ethicology for our responsibility for the created order.

1. Rabbinicism

After the destruction of the Temple a "new Judaism" arose that expanded the Pharisaic sect's application of the "tradition of the fathers." Understanding that we are all "priests" in Israel, and holy before the Lord, they sought to live in a ritual priestly state of purity. This inundated table-manners, Shabbat-keeping and ordinary day to day activities. Post-Temple destruction necessitated a new system that required "holiness" without the sanctification of the Temple and its sacrifices. The post-destruction rabbis who were the successors of the "mantle" of Jewish authority were elevated to their position based upon knowledge and education, not by priestly lineage. Life was regulated strictly by *halakha*³⁶ without the necessity of Temple sacrifices, which were replaced by prayer, study and charity. Even the smallest activities in life were subject to purity regulation.³⁷ Living the exemplary holy life would hasten the coming of the

³⁶ The rabbis divided the regulations into six orders in the Mishnah, corresponding to every major one of life's activities and exposures: work, holydays, home life, social relations, Temple life and spiritual pollution. These were further subdivided into tractates and still further into *mase'khat* and *mishnahiyot*, for purpose of study and application. They were contained in the Mishnah, a law code and then expounded in the Gemara, with continued conversations among the learned on the interpretation, application and nuances of *halakha* down to this very day.

³⁷ This included, for example, straining a gnat from the drinking cup, the minimum amount of se'ahs of flowing water that must fill the *mikvah*, and what percent of unkosher food is acceptable when mixed with kosher food.

Messiah, and the restoration of the World. The rabbis were all about patience and *tikkun olam* — Israel’s role in the redemption of the world. Aware that there was no imminent reversal of the plight, they hunkered down in Torah study and holy living for the unforeseeable future.³⁸

The Rabbis sought to repair the world (*tikkun olam*), and reduce chaos, by exercising a daily and regulated walk, in a seemingly exhaustive cyclical ritual. *Halakhic* regulation was designed to reduce uncertainty and maintain order and holiness while awaiting the Messiah. It provided a blueprint for the community that drew the people together. It provides us with the example of a worldly focus on the holiness of God’s creations and *tikkun olam*, while at the same time occupying with the work of HaShem, while patiently awaiting the return of Messiah.

2. Kabbalism

Kabbalism sought to make sense out of Jewish exile and harsh treatment with no end in sight. Its theurgic presentation supplied the missing link between God’s covenant relationship with Israel and Israel’s tortuous existence and alienation. Israel’s exile parroted Shekhina’s exile. With its rich goal of *tikkun olam* it drew on new concepts that awakened a visualization of a transition from exile to redemption, with the centrality of Israel toward that end.

Classic kabbalism (pre-Lurianic) focused on the emanations of God as the creative force that overflowed into our world. Neo-kabbalistic Lurianic “circle of mystics” in Sefat embraced the concept of *tzimtzum* (contraction) as the salient creative event necessary to make room for the created other. Deeply embedded within the kabbalistic-structured Godhead is this dialectic between *shefa* (infinitudinal overflowing) and *tzimtzum* (finite contraction), the “infinite expansion” and the “limiting withdrawal.” As a result of this dynamic tension between the finite

³⁸ This was reinforced when attempts to regain authority over the holy place ran afoul in 135 CE, and with the defeat of Bar Kochba at Bethar, one-half million Jews lay dead, and messianic expectations were thwarted.

and the infinite, a breaking of the vessels (*shevirat hakeilim*) occurred, and “broken shards” covered the “light,” thereby producing a fractured world which cries out for repair.

The doctrine of *tzimtzum* according to Lurianic kabbalah reasons that God exhaled and thereby contracted into Himself to make room for a place of unoccupied space so that He could fill it with His creations.³⁹ According to *literal tzimtzum* God withdrew and transcended from the world in the beginning and is thus beyond our world.⁴⁰ It is only Torah that is present as God’s representative and therefore the study of Torah is essential for the restoration of a broken world in exile. In contrast, the Hasidic position on Zohar and Lurianic Kabbalah posited that God merely contracted himself into the world (the non-literal position), rather than departing from it. The Besht (R. Israel Ba’al Shem Tov) championed this position, and thus saw the holiness of God everywhere; his followers “saw divine sparks, divine spirit, and marks of holiness in the living, the inanimate, and the vegetative; in trees and in stones.”⁴¹ Therefore, everyone can serve God in every time and place by every manner and way, thought and word.⁴²

Literal *tzimtzum* and non-literal *tzimtzum* clashed. Regardless of the difference, the responsibility is on Us to restore the “broken vessels” and repair the world by “raising the husks”⁴³ in order for the Exile to end and a homeostatic balance to be restored in the Upper World.⁴⁴ Creation’s “price” was disrepair and, according to neo-kabbalism, it is the personal and collective responsibility of every Jew to restore the brokenness that had infected every area of

³⁹ Hayyim Vital attributes this Isaac Luria. Etz Hayyim, Part 1, Chapter 1 (Koretz, 1784).

⁴⁰ The Gaon of Vilna’s disciples were akin to the theistic evolutionists who maintained that God created the world and then entrusted it to us as an “absentee landlord,” a “watchmaker” who creates and departs. Theistic evolution is a way to reconcile science and religion, a type of compromise to satisfy both streams. However, if science cannot prove neo-Darwinism, then it is also unable to support theistic evolution. Mutation and natural selection cannot explain the appearances of a creative Designer. Also, neo-Darwinism does not explain how genetic or epigenetic information can be transmitted in a way that would produce new animal body plans. Meyer, 410-11.

⁴¹ Rachel Elijor, “Tzimtzum: A Kabbalistic Approach to Creation,” <http://shma.com/2010/01/tzimtzum-a-kabbalistic-approach-to-creation/> (last accessed November 25, 2013).

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Roman & Alaina Wood, “Mashiach Intervene” in *Sounds of Prayer* (CD Album), 2009.

⁴⁴ Elijor, “Tzimtzum: A Kabbalistic Approach to Creation.”

creation. This is to be accomplished through keeping *mitzvot* – walking in holiness – so that the light that is trapped might be unveiled. We can benefit from this teaching by formulating a Messianic Jewish theology consistent with embracing a kabbalistic-minded complementariness among God, the natural elements and us, working to restore the “brokenness” by serving others through the “holy” creation.

II. CONSTRUCTING A METAPHORICAL HOUSE

With inspiration and awe of the Creation instilled by the scientific view; a holistic, integrated connected, communal outlook assimilated from the Ancient Hebrew mindset; a theologically-based injunction to bless the “other” appropriated from an enlightened Christian canonical narrative; and a heart for a holy walk and *tikkun olam* instilled within us from Jewish traditions, we are ready to apply these principles to construct a metaphorical house with walls of prayer (*tefillah*), rooms of study (*limmud*) and doors of loving-kindness (*gemilut chasidim*), designed to build a Messianic Jewish eco-ethicology for our responsibility for the world around us.

A. PRAISE FOR THE CREATION: PRAYER AT THE WALLS

Prayer is the essence of our spiritual walk with God, a pillar of Judaism, represented by the walls in the house under construction. These walls are semi-permeable, keeping out oppositional interferences while sufficiently porous to permit the prayers to escape outward and upward.

Scripture, particularly the Psalms, are rich with praise for the Creator, and His Creation.⁴⁵ They exalt God as the Architect of heaven and earth, and their recitation moves the reader to a heightened awe in the presence of the One whose heavens declare His glory, and the firmament, His handiwork. (Ps. 9:1) All that have breath are invited to praise the Lord for His mighty acts of grandeur. (Ps. 150) Even the sun, moon, earth, trees are commanded to praise their Creator.

⁴⁵ Ronald H. Isaacs, *The Jewish Sourcebook on the Environment and Ecology* (Northvale, NJ: Jacob Aronson, Inc., 1998), 13-21.

(Ps. 148). The Great Hallel included in Shabbat morning liturgy reaches a pinnacle of laudation, reciting God's great wonders, His creation of the natural elements, and His provision for His people with the repeated cadence of the echo, "His mercy endures forever," a refrain probably sung by the Levites in the Temple. (Ps. 136) Recitation of Psalm 104 incites the reader to the emotional depths of praise and blessing for the magnificence of the created order, for the foundations He laid, the boundaries He set and the fullness of the riches He established. These scriptures along with many more, focusing on God as Creator, elevate our hearts in gratitude, and thanksgiving for the Lord who made heaven and earth, evoking a *kavannah* response in praise.

The Siddur contains prayers grounded in scripture, which add to the daily amazement, wonderment, reverence and praise of HaShem for the physical environment that He created.⁴⁶ In the *shacharit barchu* call to congregational prayer, the *yotzer* blessing praises God for He daily "renews the work of creation," thus emphasizing His continuing involvement in the created order. Prayers for the New Moon (*Rosh Hodesh*), with its own special *musaf* punctuate respect for that celestial body which is part of the heavenly hosts, and influential on our geo-physical world. Traditional blessings for eating, bookended with the *motzei* before and the *birkhat hamazon* after, highlight thanksgiving for the food that God has provided, while reminding us that it is not through our hands only but through the creative action of God, that we enjoy life's blessings. We are not the owners of the allocated resources, but we sit at the King's table of grace, who bountifully bestows them upon us for our good pleasure.

Prayer and praise to God for the material creations that support our existence cannot be contained within the person but flow outward beyond the porous "walls," moving us to a closer connectedness to God and His creation. After all, it is not that the material creations belong to

⁴⁶ Jeremy Bernstein, *The Way Into Judaism and the Environment* (Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights, 2006), 192-99.

Us, but rather we belong to them, and they belong to God. We thus draw closer to God by drawing closer to His creations, precipitated by prayer.

B. PRESERVATION OF THE CREATION: STUDY IN THE ROOMS

Our second pillar of Judaism – study – imparts to us the knowledge of what God wants us to do as a result of His goodness of Creation, and represents the rooms of the house metaphorically – the places where we study Torah, in its expansive meaning. Scripture teaches us to be thoughtful in the way in which we treat the environment. Deuteronomy 20:19-20 is instructive. When besieging a city in war, the Israelites were not to destroy the fruit trees.⁴⁷ Wood is needed in war for warmth, siege machines, arrows and spears, and even to burn the enemies defenses and set fire punitively to their ground as in a “scorched earth” policy. But fruit trees are for food and they trump other needs even in time of war – a life or death venture. *Halakha* broadens this scriptural injunction against cutting down fruit trees during war⁴⁸ (*ba'al tashchit*), to a positive command of “do not commit waste,” and applies it to a host of environmentally conscious scenarios seemingly rooted in “do unto your neighbors.”⁴⁹ However, the *halakha* on closer examination, is primarily theo-centric evidencing the respect and right treatment of the Owner’s possessions. Simply, the natural environment is intrinsically sacred because of God’s creative power that brought it into existence.⁵⁰ We learn from scripture and its derivatives that the way we treat the environment around us reflects directly on how we treat our

⁴⁷ Other biblical environmental laws include disposal of sewage (Deut. 23:12-14), and the establishment of a “green belt” (migrash) around the Levitical cities (Num. 35:2-5; Lev. 25:34). For a worthwhile Jewish environmental children’s book with relevant stories see Molly Cone, *Listen to the Trees: Jews and the Earth* (New York: UAHC Press, 1995).

⁴⁸ Yonatan Neril, “Judaism and Environmentalism: *Bal Tashchit*,” http://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/1892179/jewish/Judaism-and-Environmentalism-Bal-Tashchit.htmhttp://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/1892179/jewish/Judaism-and-Environmentalism-Bal-Tashchit.htm (last accessed November 23, 2013).

⁴⁹ Bernstein, 214-24; see also Isaacs, 4-10. Eric Katz, “Judaism and the Ecological Crisis,” in *Worldviews and Ecology: Religion, Philosophy, and the Environment*, eds., Mary Evelyn Tucker & John A. Grim (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1994), 62-64.

⁵⁰ Katz, 65-68.

Maker. As God’s partners and guardians, we are responsible to exercise a degree of care over the deposited “articles,” just as a bailee in Jewish law is responsible for exercising prudence over the bailed item.⁵¹ Moreover, neither should we “stand idly by” (Lev. 19:16) when acts of wanton waste are perpetrated against the environment, threatening the community.⁵²

Abraham Joshua Heschel in his slim book, *The Sabbath*, captures the heart of man well, when he characterizes western civilization as bent on acquisition of things, thus sacrificing sacred time with God.⁵³ The natural sequitur is that greed is at the bottom of the desire to treat the earth that God gave us as a profit center, with a myopic focus on the bottom line, rather than for the good of all. Many Believers justify this treatment of the environment with the early biblical text where God commissions us to subdue (*kabash*) and have dominion (*radah*) over the earth. (Gen. 1:26, 28) The word *kabash* has a range of meanings from the extreme of “rape” to the relatively benign “acquire control.” When examined in connection with Genesis 2:15 where Adam is placed in the garden to till the land and guard it, the more benign semantic application is a better fit. It is delegated to us to be caretakers of the land that God entrusted to us. We are to “acquire control” so that we can be good stewards over the land, responsible and careful

⁵¹ “What we possess we do not own. We merely hold it in trust for God.” Jonathan Sachs, *To Heal a Fractured World: The Ethics of Responsibility* (New York: Schocken, 2007) (kindle edition, loc 660); see also Ex.22:7-15; Lev. 6:1-7 specifying the classes of bailments and the bailee’s responsibilities.

⁵² Bernstein, 88-93.

⁵³ Abraham Joshua Heschel, *The Sabbath* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1975), 3-4:

To gain control of the world of space is certainly one of our tasks. The danger begins when in gaining power in the realm of space we forfeit all aspirations in the realm of time. There is a realm of time where the goal is not to have but to be, not to own but to give, not to control but to share, not to subdue but to be in accord. Life goes wrong when the control of space, the acquisition of things of space, becomes our sole concern. . . . There is happiness in the love of labor, there is misery in the love of gain. Many hearts and pitchers are broken at the fountain of profit. Selling himself into slavery of things, man becomes a utensil that is broken at the fountain. . . . Technical civilization stems primarily from the desire of man to subdue and manage the forces of nature.

gardeners, not to violate the command to restrain from eating of the tree that God forbade. For, “if [man] ruins nature, he ruins his own life and the life of his descendants.”⁵⁴

The word *radah* also has a range of meanings, frequently translated “dominion,” an exercise of power that is associated with monarchical empowerment and force. The logical extension is that nature is here to serve us at our pleasure, with no boundaries. In the nine times *radah* is used in the Hebrew Bible it is pretty much associated with the brute force a military campaign asserts against its enemy; in that sense it means “rule over” its conquered. It is invoked when a king subjugates its subjects. But this strong application appears in scripture when the subjugated is hostile. Nature in its natural state is not ordinarily hostile, at least not of the variety that requires a violent reaction to selfishly dominate it, for fear of rebellion. God did not put man in the garden to exploit it with impunity.

We are called to subdue the earth and exercise “dominion” over the creation, but what does that dominion look like? The answer may lie in the context of the verses under consideration. Prefatory to the appearance of *kabash* and *radah*, verse 26 reads: “And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. . . .”⁵⁵ Our rule and dominion then should be one that bespeaks of the image of God, and mirror how He rules over His creation. Psalm 72:8 is instructive. Messiah shall have dominion from:

sea to sea, and from the river to the ends of the earth. . . . For He will deliver the needy who cry out, the afflicted who have no one to help. He will take pity on the weak and the needy and save the needy from death. He will rescue them from oppression and violence, for precious is their blood in his sight. (Ps. 72: 12-14)

This then is the way that we should exercise dominion over the natural elements – for the good of people – as stewards over the resources God has entrusted to us, for preservation and meeting

⁵⁴ Juster, 110.

⁵⁵ See also Gen. 1:27: “So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them.”

the needs of others. The meaning then of *radah* in context is that of a tenant farmer who exercises good stewardship over the environment commensurate with the way that the Owner has done by example and in which He delights. The stakes of this stewardship responsibility are high – blessing or cursing – as we are instructed in the parable of the unfaithful servant in Matthew 24: 48-51.⁵⁶

More study in the rooms of the house will evoke more realization of our covenantal responsibility for protecting and preserving that which God has given to us, and using it responsibly. Four rabbinic celebrations are further instructive toward this end: *shmittah*, *yovel*, *pe'ah* and *tu b'shevat*.

1. Shmittah

The Bible institutes a sabbatical year for the cessation of working the land.⁵⁷ The Shmittah year is like a super-Sabbath in which every seven years the ground rests, debts are canceled, and in a sense we prepare to start anew. It mirrors God's cessation of His work and His rest on the seventh day, when He blessed and sanctified it. God instituted first by example, and then by commandment the Shabbat, reflecting the memory of creation (Gen. 2: 1-3), harkening back to when God rested on the seventh day. (Ex. 20:11) In the wilderness wanderings God provided food on the seventh day by depositing a double portion of manna for the children of Israel roaming in the desert. In the seventh year we are to cease working the land for a whole year. It takes faith to trust in the providential care of God. It also moves us to come into greater dependency upon others, our social contacts increase and so does our communal outlook. There is definitely a tie between the land and the people, and between permitting the land to rest and

⁵⁶ See Lee Canipe, "Rethinking Dominion in Genesis 1:27-28," <http://www.christianethicstoday.com/cetart/index.cfm?fuseaction=Articles.main&ArtID=1172> (last accessed November 19, 2013).

⁵⁷ Lev. 25:17; see also Ex. 23:10-12 and Deut. 15:1-8 (release of debts).

individual and societal response. It provides the outlook that the land does not really belong to us,⁵⁸ but instead, we belong to the land, and together we belong to God. It is a sound rational usage of the land using foresight, rather than a singleness of focus on what can the land do for me now.

Shmittah tends to smooth out the economic disparities between the poor and the rich as well as planning through helping others. Moses warned against the tendency not to loan to others when the sabbatical year is near, because of the fear that those debts will not be repaid. (Deut. 15:9) That would be an abandonment of the poor and biblically wrong, as contrary to a myriad of passages, including the commandment to provide for the poor brother in the land. (Deut. 15:10)⁵⁹

2. Yovel

There is even a super-shmittah, every fiftieth year, *Yovel*, or the year of Jubilee, in which the land lies quiet, the people are forgiven their debts and the land reverts back to the tribal owner's heirs. This makes it very clear that the Land belongs to God.⁶⁰ And it can never be lost to the alien since God has given it to Israel as an inheritance. It also contrasts with the surrounding civilizations who were more hierarchical-handed, legislating a feudal system that oppressed the landless class. *Yovel* is more of an egalitarian economic regulation designed to prevent wealthy class owners from dominating at the expense of a landless class of peasants indentured for generations. Here is the "high view" of socio-economic justice. Every Israelite received an

⁵⁸ Lev. 25:23.

⁵⁹ Because of the human tendency to ignore the pleas of the poor in face of the shmittah year, the great sage Hillel instituted the *prosbul*, a legal formula whereby one could circumvent the release of debts and still stay true to Torah. He constructed a device whereby the creditor could transfer the debt to the court, which is not bound by the Biblical injunction to forgive debt. Thus, the court could collect the debt after the shmittah year and repay the creditor. Jill Jacobs, *There Shall be No Needy: Pursuing Social Justice Through Jewish Law and Tradition* (Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights, 2010), 33. The *prosbul* took away the rationale for denying loans to the poor, as the shmittah year approached.

⁶⁰ Lev. 25:23 ("The land must not be sold permanently because the Land is mine.").

inheritance consistent with the land grant to the tribes described in Numbers and Joshua. Hence, there is a Divine limit that is imposed on a family's poverty landless condition, for the year of Jubilee is always coming to restore the family economic thresh-hold.⁶¹ This illustrates the heart of God, which we should imitate.

3. Pe'ah

Then there is a type of mini-*shmittah* tied to the land that is divinely instituted as a humanitarian outreach to the needy other. Unlike *shmittah*, which applies to the whole land, *pe'ah* only applies to the corners of the field, and it is not related to indebtedness, but rather confined to the land's produce. We find in three places the injunction not to cut the corner of the fields upon harvest but to leave the gleanings for the poor and the alien.⁶² We do not know the many testimonies of those who found themselves in need and were rescued by the *pe'ah* mandate. But we do know the testimony of Messiah whose lineal paternal ancestor Ruth experienced the grace of God due to this injunction, and was drawn close to her redeemer Boaz, and consequently we to our Redeemer Messiah Yeshua.

God created this world and owns it all. He chose to give a portion to the Jewish people as an irrevocable distribution,⁶³ instructing them through Torah to give from the "leasehold" portions to the poor and alien. By doing this the "owner" recognizes that God owns the land and that the tenant-steward is a participant in the plan of God, facilitating the fulfillment of God's promises and mutual blessings.⁶⁴ To hold back is to disobey Torah and rob God.⁶⁵

4. Tu b'shevat

⁶¹ Richard Elliott Friedman, *Commentary on the Torah* (New York: HarperCollins, 2003), 402-03.

⁶² Lev. 19: 9, 23:22; Deut. 24:19-22.

⁶³ The contours of the shape of the Land may differ over time, and Jewish people may even be dispossessed from the Land for a time. Nonetheless, even in the diaspora there is a longing for the return, perhaps moved by the Spirit of God who unconditionally covenanted the Land to Avram and his seed *l'olam va'ed*.

⁶⁴ Dorff, 135.

⁶⁵ Mal. 3:8.

Tu B'shevat is the Jewish New Year for trees. Within the first three years it is prohibited to eat of the fruit of the tree; and this day, the 15th of Shevat, marks the starting point for determining the counting of the age of a tree. (Lev. 19:23) Today in Israel it is a day of ecological awareness.

Trees are abundantly invoked in rabbinic lore.⁶⁶ The sages saw a nexus between the Messiah and the produce of the land. We read of the teaching concerning such by Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai, the Yavneh patriarch who “sat” at the head of the mishnaic sages; he taught: “If you have a sapling in your hand and someone tells you the Messiah has arrived, first plant the sapling and then go out to welcome the Messiah”⁶⁷

We are graced with still another tree story exhibiting the value of tree planting, which appears in the Talmud:

One day, Honi was journeying on the road and he saw a man planting a carob tree. He asked him, ‘How long does it take for this tree to bear fruit?’ The man replied, ‘Seventy years.’ Honi asked, ‘Do you think you will live another seventy years?’ The man replied, ‘When I came into the world, I found carob trees. Much as my parents planted these for me, so I plant these for my children.’⁶⁸

Hence, the planting of trees has both practical benefits for shade, food and aesthetics, and spiritual benefits for symbolizing in a very tangible way, the life giving source of this universe. It also serves as a metaphor for our *dor l’dor* responsibility for continuity and valuing resources for laudable purposes and use. After all, our earth supports our future; without it, Messiah simply has no place to return. When we honor our environment we bless its Creator. As often as you have done it to the least of this environment, you have done it to my brethren, to take liberty with

⁶⁶ In the practical realm it is interesting that the circle of kabbalists in the 16th century in Sefat reinstated *tu b’shevat* which had lost its significance in the *galut*. The kabbalists re-infused it with a new meaning relating to the divine attributes of God which were symbolized in the form of a tree of life. The day was celebrated by reviewing these attributes (*sefirot*) of the Tree of Life, and included a meal with fruits and nuts from a variety of trees. See Bernstein, 180; Isaac, 35. The Sefat circle of Lurianic kabbalists found triangular connectedness here among God, humans and trees.

⁶⁷ Avot d’ Rabbi Natan B31.

⁶⁸ bT, Ta’anit 23a.

a quote by Yeshua.⁶⁹ How we treat the soil, the inanimate rocks, the forests, the physical environment around us, says a lot about our respect for the Creator, and how we view our fellow human being.

C. PROVISION OF THE CREATION: LOVING-KINDNESS THROUGH THE DOORS

The Bible is replete with Scripture compelling us to relieve the suffering of the other – the poor, the orphan, the widow, and the disabled.⁷⁰ We are called to make provision for the less fortunate. Our attitude should be “What’s mine is God’s and I am willing to share it.”⁷¹ This is often accomplished by reconfiguring and redistributing the earth’s natural resources.⁷² By doing so we honor our Maker.⁷³ Loving-kindness fuses our respect for the environment, and thus for its Creator, with a scriptural sacrifice for the “other” and thereby satisfies an ethical mandate for our responsibility for the “other.” It is not enough to preserve the environment, but we must also use the environment for the greater good of the needy. And that would include not only delivery of reconfigured natural resources but also delivery of services to the needy since we too are part of the “natural resources” of creation. Communal ingenuity and creativity should have no bounds when it comes to goods and services for the other, including counseling, health care and disaster relief.

Loving-kindness is the door. It is the door where Yeshua stands and knocks and comes in and has table fellowship with Us. We open it to Him who stands there humbly on the margins and by doing so we too are on the margins with Him.⁷⁴ On the margins we are able to go out and meet

⁶⁹ Matt. 25: 31-46.

⁷⁰ See eg., Lev. 19:19-20; Deut. 15:11; Isa. 1:17; Jer. 22:11; Zech. 7:10; Ps. 82:4; Prov. 14: 31, 19:17; Matt. 5:42;, 25:35-40; Mk. 10:21; Luke 6:38, 12: 33-34, 14: 12-14; Acts 20:35; Heb. 13:16; James 1:27; Phil. 2:4; 1 Jn. 3:17-18.

⁷¹ Rick Warren, Interview with Piers Morgan, CNN, (re-run December 6, 2013).

⁷² Lev. 19: 9-10 (*pe'ah*).

⁷³ Prov. 14:31.

⁷⁴ “God stands together with the poor person at the door, and one should therefore consider Whom one is confronting.” *Leviticus Rabbah* 34:9 *quoted in* Dorff, at 150.

the straggler, the beggar, the unfortunate, the needy. By meeting them we meet God.⁷⁵ By serving them, we serve God. The door of loving-kindness is double-hinged. It swings both ways. It lets Yeshua in and it provides a path for us to go out in imitation of him. Outward through the door we do his miracles of healing and “moving the earth” so that it may be accessible to “others.” This is a community endeavor to exercise love of our Jewish neighbor, by sacrificial action, and our fellow believers,⁷⁶ and to the world at large. Through Israel the wider world is blessed, and Messianic Jewish communities, as priestly representatives of wider Jewry, are a key source of blessings to the Nations.

D. SUMMARY OF THE HOLISTIC CONSTRUCTED HOUSE

The walls of prayer, the rooms of study, and the doors of loving-kindness combine to provide the impetus for our actions. Then we find the “other” in the image of Yeshua at the wells where the Samaritan woman hung out. We find her before the elders accused of adultery ready to be stoned by her accusers. We find her gleaning in the fields like Ruth; we find him lying on the road beaten and sick and tired, as the religious cross the other side to avoid him. We find him in our midst. We find him in ourselves. For we who stole, steal no more but rather work with our hands to give to those who have need.⁷⁷

III. SHAPING A MESSIANIC JEWISH ECO-ETHICOLOGICAL STRUCTURE

God the Creator blessed the human family with the blessings of each other. It is in the “other” that we see the image of God and ourselves and are thereby blessed. Throughout scripture we are

⁷⁵ See Russ Resnik, “An Ethical Window: Framing a Messianic Jewish moral perspective” (in meeting the hungry, sick or estranged, we meet Messiah, 9-10); see also Russ Resnik, “Messianic Jewish Ethics” in *Introduction to Messianic Judaism: Its Ecclesial Context and Biblical Foundations*, David Rudolph & Joel Willits, eds. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2013), 86-89 (on the margins “we must meet our Messiah, and it is there that we may most effectively mirror his ways.” *ibid.*, 89).

⁷⁶ Dr. Carl Kinbar exegetes Leviticus 19:6 and Yeshua’s reiteration of it, “Thou shall love your neighbor as yourself,” by concluding that it refers to our Jewish neighbor; however, he also notes that Yeshua expands the obligation to love to the new covenant community of Jew and Gentile, when he gives a new commandment, “love one another as I have loved you.” Carl Kinbar, “First Steps in Messianic Jewish Ethics,” in *First Steps in Messianic Jewish Ethics: Defining Our Involvement with One Another and the World About Us* (Hashivenu, 2013), 41-61.

⁷⁷ Eph. 4:28.

taught that he who exalts himself will be debased and he who humbles himself will be exalted. Through parables, experiential lessons, aphorisms, teachings in strategic forums and a host of pedagogical expressions we learn time and time again that the poor are the blessed, and that we ought to participate in enriching them. By doing so we enrich the community and ourselves as part of that community. By doing so we grow closer to God who is also the “Other.” Turning chaos to cosmos by blessing the other with the raw stuff God bestowed upon this earth we make this planet a better place for all of us to live.

Poverty is not confined to the physical but neither does it exclude it. So, “when did we visit you, when did we clothe you, when did we feed you,” translates into how we treated the brethren who were needy.⁷⁸ How we treat the least of these, is not a far midrashic shot from how we treat the earth around us. For it is this earth that God determined to make His habitat for mutual economy of blessing each other through a diversity of interdependence.⁷⁹ He did not just throw out a homogenous sea of bland oceans but He filled them with an eco-system that is “out of this world.” In its bio-diversity and synergistic interdependence He created a balance in nature that is sustainable and instructional. Through the rhythms of the anemone tentacles brushing the rocks, the fish supplying the needed excretion for micro-organisms that regulate climate control, and the algae cleansing the streams, we have living breathing waters of oceans, rivers and lakes that contain mutual interdependent blessings through multi-varied combinations of animate and inanimate relationships, all harmonized in an eco-divine plan that reveals the heart and mind of our Creator. It all pulsates together. This oceanic robust ecologically vibrant cacophony of

⁷⁸ Matt. 25: 31-46. See also:

[A] person should imitate the righteous ways of the Holy One, blessed be God. Just as the Lord clothed the naked . . . so too you must supply clothes for the naked [poor]. Just as the Holy One, blessed be God, visited the sick . . . so too you should visit the sick. Just as the Holy One, blessed be God, buried the dead . . . so too you must bury the dead. Just as the Holy One, blessed be God, comforted mourners . . . so too you should comfort mourners. bT, Sotah 14a, in Dorff, 138

⁷⁹ Juster, 22 (“the natural order reflects an amazing symbiosis”).

movement in a programmed rhythm, seething with order, and eco-balance is repeated in the stroke of the Creator in every platform, in the heavens above and the earth below. It is God's rich earth – the physical environment – that brings us All together. Even the trees depend upon us for their life and breath and we depend upon them for ours.

We in his likeness are very much part of geo- and bio-diversity rhythm that bespeaks of God's "intelligent design."⁸⁰ We participate in the rhythm of God's breath, both in the inter-spatial silence of the pause and the active beat of the movement. It is mirrored in the Jewish cycles of *Shabbat*, *Shmittah*, and *Yovel*, all in community consistent with the cosmic waves and vibrations of a universe frothing with the dialectics of sound and silence, work and rest, gigantic and miniscule, so near and so far, so broad and so deep. It is a humongous organic celebration of God's creation in a grand orchestral flotilla of heavenly beats against rhythms ricocheting off of each other, and through rubbing and throbbing making melody by the majestic sound of the universal choir in harmonic pitch with Ha Shem. No wonder the prophet proclaimed in a state of heightened jubilation and awareness that "all the trees of the fields will clap their hands." This is marvelous in our sight. This is the doing of the Lord – all laden with mysteries and all imbued with awesome connectedness and inner-workings; from the smallest intracellular speck to the largest celestial asteroid, we are all constructed with the same stuff because we all owe our existence to the same Artist.⁸¹

⁸⁰ For a very compelling case for intelligent design by invoking "abductive inference," through scientific elimination of suggested causes, isolating characteristics within the observation that have known antecedent causes and thus hypothesizing by historical inference that the probable reason is the one that explains those characteristics see Meyer, 336-381.

⁸¹ Yigal Deutscher, "Embracing the Shmita Cycle: A New Year Vision" in *Tikkun Daily* (online version) <https://www.tikkun.org/tikkundaily/2012/09/16/embracing-the-shmita-cycle-a-new-year-vision/> (last visited October 13, 2013):

The fabric of the entire Jewish cosmology, culture, and story is interwoven with the patterns of these cycles. These cycles create our collective, evolving body. Not just the human body, but the body of Earth, of life itself. We mark time with these movements of transformation, with this cyclical dance. Look above at the luminous gemstones nested in our inky oceans of night, where this flow of breath slows down over a

In the stillness of the rhythmic pause we know that we are not alone, but that we are in it together with the accompaniment that God has created for our interdependent sustenance, pleasure, and blessings. We all need each “other” for harmonic balance. The provision of nature is there for us to manipulate, reconstruct, and thereby bless the “other.” Hence, if God blessed us with this environment how much more should we seek to imitate the Creator and bless others by being good stewards and utilizing it to reduce suffering and enhance happiness in the “other.”⁸² He planted a tree in the Garden and when we entered the land of Canaan we too planted trees. By planting trees we are imitating the Creator, by distributing the “seeds” and bringing life to a land that was infected with malaria and unregenerous soil, but is now redeemed and provides a redistribution of wealth at our hands.⁸³

We are called to contribute to the healing of this fractured world⁸⁴ by partnering with God to defeat the chaotic evil that seeks to divest us of God’s created order and mutuality of blessings.⁸⁵ God sweetened the bitter waters of Marah with the tree of Elam. He stopped the sun and the moon, reigned stones on Israel’s enemies, and enlisted Joshua to aid the weak.⁸⁶ Likewise, Moses’ command of the waters resulted in the neutralization of evil but at the same

month’s time. We watch her body wax and wane, her belly swell and diminish. At the start of every month, we celebrate Rosh Chodesh, the New Moon. But before that delicate tiny sliver of a new moon is revealed, once again renewing her cycle, we recognize the month’s *molad*, her birth. And this birth occurs at the dark moon, the invisible moon; the movement between the new moon and the old, when the inky ocean at night has completely swallowed and washed over our moon. It is this moment which is the same as the cycles of our own rhythmic breath, our beating heartbeat and flowing pulse . . . that cyclical moment in between the action, that moment of total stillness.

⁸² When instructing us for the Highest Holiday – Yom Kippur – after chastising us for the fast that we do, He instructs us on what we should do: “It is to share the bread with the hungry, And to take the wretched poor into your home; When you see the naked, to clothe him And not to ignore your kin.” (Isa. 58:7)

⁸³ Today Israel flourishes with trees that have been planted inter-generationally. What Jew of my vintage cannot remember the excitement as a kid of planting trees in Israel by proxy through pasting purchased “leaf stickers” on pictures of trees provided by our Hebrew school? How many trees have been planted as a result of the deaths of our loved ones?

⁸⁴ For a comprehensive read on this topic see Jonathan Sachs, *To Heal a Fractured World: The Ethics of Responsibility* (New York: Schocken, 2007).

⁸⁵ For an interesting perspective on chaos and order see Jon D. Levenson, *Creation and the Persistence of Evil: The Jewish Drama of Divine Omnipotence* (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 1988).

⁸⁶ See Joshua 10: 7-15.

time it saved the Israelites from certain destruction.⁸⁷ We too are challenged to imitate the Dei by “working smart”– using the natural elements to destroy the bad while at the same time promoting good and blessing others. Our people have a habit of doing this and doing it well. Prizes awarded to Jews speak well of their ubiquitous advancements in various disciplines of medicine and science, who like Moses, reconfigured the natural elements to destroy the bad while bringing blessing to the world. A good modern example of this is the polio vaccine created by Jonas Salk. He used an attenuated polio virus, which appeared to be “bad,” but which effectively triggered the production of antibodies that fought off the invading virile virus. He took the “bad” virus and worked it out for good. It is all mindful of Joseph and his storehouse of grain and his ability as a result to ultimately save his brethren and reduce the pain of famine. What his brethren had sought for evil God worked out for good. (Gen. 50:20) We should through communal creative endeavors expand the delivery of good to whatever service the needy require,⁸⁸ even as Yeshua came to “minister.” We should follow His example by being good stewards, managing what God has set before us to bless the “other,” who bears the image of God. We can bless others through the environmental diversity that God has provided and assure that we are better gardeners than even Adam and Eve who were thrust out for disobeying the Gardener’s rule. We can graciously clothe the naked as God did in the garden after the Fall.

⁸⁷ This principle of the healing virtue of waters destroying the “enemy” is scripturally illustrated in Ezekiel’s vision [Ezekiel 47:1-12] when he was shown a polluted ocean, with its fish and other marine life near death. Then a small trickle of water emerged from under the threshold of the Temple – ‘water signifies Torah,’ and the Temple is but the sanctuary of the Torah. Gradually the water grew to a great stream, on whose shore grew all manner of fruit trees, whose leaves do not wither and whose fruits never cease. When these waters reach the ocean, the polluted ocean waters are healed, and all the fish and marine life return to health.

Yehudah Levi, “Ecology, A Jewish Perspective,” <http://www.aish.com/h/15sh/i/48967316.html> (last accessed November 25, 2013). This presents an interesting exegetical intertextual comparison with Rev. 22:1-2, where fruit leaves of the tree of life associated with a “pure river” promotes the healing of the nations.

⁸⁸ Buckminster Fuller, a 20th century architect-visionary- futurist- philosopher, saw the earth as a ship. Not unlike Noah’s ark, resources are limited, but through synergistic applications he proposed ways to deal with the world’s hunger and housing problems. He combined design and science as a “problem solving approach which entails a rigorous, systematic study of the deliberate ordering of the components in our Universe.” <http://bfi.org/>

(Gen. 3:21) And who knows, perhaps by doing so we will actually entertain angels; or, maybe even God Himself.⁸⁹ At the Feast of Tabernacles we invite the patriarchs into our Sukkah to dwell and eat with us. In kabalistic circles we actually invite the *Shekhina* and other *Sefirot* (emanations of God) to participate with us as well. May this be a good analogy and lesson for us. Let us cultivate the good on this earth for the betterment of earth people, participating in delivering the valuable resources to the neediest in our midst and beyond, while preserving that which God created and called “very good.” As a covenant people, let us be the example that we are called to be, redeeming (with a small r) that which was lost in the Garden, and being leaders in that direction. It is not enough to live in this blessing, but we are all called to the process of “becoming” a blessing.⁹⁰ “Hereby we perceive the love of God, that He laid down His life for us; therefore we ought to lay down our life for our brethren.” (I Jn. 3:16) If the gospel is the message of salvation, then solid humanitarian concern and action is the *key*.

The earth cries out and groans along with its inhabitants, for we all live on this wretched earth, peppered with a plethora of “broken cisterns,” wreaking with the odor of a planet gone awry. Living in a house of community with the window sills of Torah,⁹¹ the rooms of study, the walls of prayer and the doors of loving-kindness, we are equipped to turn righteousness, right-side up⁹² and impact the world with greater works than even our Messiah did. He did not reach the world, but we will reach the world and the gospel will be preached to the ends of the earth and then the end shall come. He did not reach the Jewish people but we will reach out to the four corners of the world to the Jewish people and “All Israel will be saved.” He fed the multitudes

⁸⁹ See the pericope involving Abraham and the three visitors. (Gen. 18: 1-22, 19:1).

⁹⁰ The aspect of “becoming” as opposed to “being” is wrapped up in Jewish process theology which sees God and His creation as dynamic, integrative, co-relational and connected and His people ever progressing, partnering, adapting, acting, accommodating, pursuing and advancing. See Bradley Shavit Artson, *God of Becoming and Relationship: The Dynamic Nature of Process Theology* (Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights, 2013).

⁹¹ Russ Resnik, “An Ethical Window: Framing a Messianic Jewish moral Perspective,” 12-14.

⁹² David ben Gurion stood on his head so that the State of Israel could stand on its feet.

but we will feed more by multiplying the food and redistributing it to the places of need. Yeshua reconfigured nature and the laws of buoyancy when he walked on it. We will restore the broken cisterns and re-channel the flow of water so that it fills those cisterns, and thereby reach the thirsty. Like God we will use the elements before us to re-allocate the natural resources to effectuate the blessing that God has called us to be.

Beyond imitating God as good stewards who bless others with the natural elements with which God blessed us, we also need to live a proleptic life in anticipation of the future kingdom⁹³ when the nations will be healed by the fruit leaves from the tree of life (Rev. 22:2), when we will drink of the waters from the fountain of life (Rev. 21: 6), when the wolf will live with the lamb, and when God's light will illuminate our way forever. (Rev. 22: 5) Like the traveler let us prepare ourselves today in anticipation for tomorrow.

IV. COMPLETING THE EDIFICE

We have identified some building blocks in the construction of the metaphorical house that should enable us to continue the design-build. There is the realization of the “awesomeness” of creation heightened by our advancement in science. Another block is the holistic view and communal activist approach embedded in the Hebrew semitic mind-set. Additionally, a fair and balanced view of scripture requires us as the priestly representative of Israel to see God through the lens of His created order, thus providing us with another block that moves us to facilitate interdependent mutuality of blessings. Rabbinic Judaism and Kabbalism provide additional blocks that remind us of our God-given duty to participate in the repair of the world – the defeat of chaos and the restoration of order.

Now we need to enter the constructed house with its walls of prayer, its rooms of study and its doors of loving-kindness and take up our responsibility “to honor the image of God in the

⁹³ See Juster, 116-123

other . . . and thus turn the world into a home for the divine presence.”⁹⁴ Scripture calls us covenantally to cultivate nature and redistribute its “fruits” and thereby bless “others.”⁹⁵ It is not enough to preserve nature, but we should also be motivated through praise and study to “capture” it and through repackaging and re-distribution, enrich the “other” in our close community, our wider community and in the world. By these actions we partnership with God and imitate what He does with His creation, while anticipating the future kingdom. After all,

[w]e are here to make a difference, to mend the fractures of the world, a day at a time, an act at a time, for as long as it takes to make it a place of justice and compassion where the lonely are not alone, the poor not without help; where the cry of the vulnerable is heeded and those who are wronged are heard.⁹⁶

God has given us the resources to reconfigure and distribute and make the difference as often as we recognize that “[s]omeone else’s physical needs are [our] spiritual obligation.”⁹⁷ It is then that we come closest to seeing the world through the eyes of God and the message of salvation and humanitarianism fuse into the really good news, for both Jew and Gentile, Israel and the Nations.

With that this paper does not end. In fact, it is only a continuation of the conversation that has lingered long before we first inhaled. Like Talmudic discourse it continues open-ended. There are dialectics stretching backward to our rich shared heritage and forward to generations to come, all adding a diversity of “holy voices” which will continue long after we exhaust our thoughts of the day, well into the depths of the night until the brightness of the “Sun of Righteousness arise with healing in his wings and [we] go free, leaping with joy like calves let out to pasture.”⁹⁸

⁹⁴ Sachs, *Fractured World* (kindle edition, loc 74).

⁹⁵ See Juster, 21-22.

⁹⁶ Sachs, *Fractured World* (kindle edition, loc 90-91).

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, loc 91.

⁹⁸ Mal. 4:2.

APPENDIX A

LISTENING TO THE VOICES

Jews have a special God-covenanted responsibility for the world and Messianic Jews have a greater responsibility for the world not only because our Messiah is seated in heavenly places with the Father, but as the elect representative of the covenant people of God, we enjoy heightened prophetic and priestly duties associated with that responsibility. There are of course a number of views and attitudes when it comes to responsibility for the physical planetary space we inhabit. We cannot capture all the views but here are four that define the outliers, the bounds from which we can continue to frame our discussion.

THE FOUR SCENARIOS

I. Paul's agnosticism

Paul is a faithful Christian who sees his identity rooted in Jesus. He fashions himself as a lay theologian and always looks deeply into questions of faith and action and seeks to discern God's will through scripture, reason, and tradition of his Christian community. The question has arisen in his circle of fellowship: "Should believers be concerned about the physical environment on this earth and thus be moved to action to engage in conservation of the resources?" Paul does not know but he is a good listener and is interested in the points of view of others within his circle. Conclusion: Keep praying about man's responsibility for the environment and wait on God to reveal the answer.

II. Jennifer's status quo

This world was created by God but fell at the disobedient hands of Adam and Eve. Scripture and Science tell us that our days are numbered; and that the "earth will pass away and melt with fervent heat." Our resources are limited and there is little we can do to stop its depletion over time. A Christian's undue focus on our irreversible environment diverts valuable energy to

something that is reversible like the hardened hearts of people which can be changed by the gospel.

Conclusion: Do not seek to pollute the environment but neither seek to redeem it.

III. Karen's middle of the road

Karen believes that the gospel of salvation is the single thrust of the believer and that anything less is pretty meaningless. On the other hand she is concerned about the environment in which her children and grandchildren inherit. She is not an anti-environmentalist. She just thinks that this should be left to the unregenerate environmentalists. By the way she thinks the same way about war – leave it to the unbelievers.

Conclusion: Separate the gospel message from the practical message of environmentalism and focus on the gospel message.

IV. Manny's activism

Manny believes that what God forms is good. Thus, we should seek to restore what is good to as original state as possible. Believers are duty-bound by scripture to promote the sustainability of the planet that God created and inhabited. This includes joining forces with like-minded environmentalists to “hug trees” and engage in civil disobedience if necessary to insure that our planet will sustain life.

Conclusion: Organize to insure the future of our planet by any means necessary.