

46TH ASSEMBLY, December 2007
GLOBAL WARMING

This is the way of the righteous . . . , who love peace and rejoice in the good in people and bring them close to Torah: that nothing, not even a grain of mustard, should be lost to the world, that they should regret any loss or destruction that they see, and if possible they will prevent any destruction that they can. (Sefer Ha-Hinukh #529, www.coejl.org/~coejlor/learnje_tashchit.php)

Issue

Research has shown that greenhouse gases, produced by humans, have had potentially dangerous environmental consequences.

Background

Scientists, including those at National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA), the Columbia University Earth Institute, and most recently, the Intergovernmental Panel for Climate Change (IPCC), have demonstrated that human activity, especially in the production of greenhouse gases, during this and the previous century is affecting our climate and weather patterns adversely. IPCC is a United Nations entity and is composed of respected scientists from across the globe. Their report was based on careful research and interpretation of data; the object was to present a balanced view, which it did.

Global warming appears to be causing extreme weather events from pole to pole. Indigenous populations of northern Canada, for example, are noticing a warming of the polar region causing a melting of Arctic ice. As more ice melts, less sunlight is reflected, leading to acceleration of the temperature rise. On land, permafrost is melting as well. All of these changes are seriously upsetting the ecological balance of the region, probably resulting in a decrease in biodiversity and consequential detrimental effects on food chains and food webs for both people and animals.

Human activities in the low latitudes also are upsetting natural balances. The removal of enormous tracts of trees in areas such as the Amazon rainforest through fires and excessive logging is sharply reducing the natural carbon dioxide trapping and oxygen-producing abilities of trees and other vegetation. This loss of natural vegetation and ground cover can be expected to lead to more damage to the complex ecosystems of the tropical and equatorial regions.

The middle latitudes are not immune to the massive production of greenhouse gases. James Hansen of the NASA Goddard Institute for Space Studies warns “if global emissions of carbon dioxide continue to rise at the rate of the past decade, . . . research shows that there will be disastrous effects, . . . including frequency of droughts and floods, and increased stress on wildlife and plants due to rapidly shifting climate zones” (www.giss.nasa.gov/research/news/20070530).

The increasing severity of recent hurricanes and tornadoes and other weather events may be the result of the natural vagaries of weather. However, desertification is increasing at an alarming

rate, vegetation zones have shifted, animal migration patterns have changed, and the geographical ranges of diseases have expanded.

Women of Reform Judaism has demonstrated a continuing concern about the effects of the environment on people and nations having previously adopted resolutions on environment pollution (1969, 1983, 1992), on energy conservation (1973, 1977, 1979) and children's health and the environment (2001, 2003). At this time global warming and climate change are critical environmental issues that require action as well.

Therefore Women of Reform Judaism calls upon its sisterhoods to:

1. Study the effects of global warming in their localities and their nation,
2. Inform sisterhood members and congregants about climate change issues,
3. Seek ways to make their synagogues and homes as "green" as possible, and
4. Urge their local, state, provincial, and federal leaders to
 - a. Support the benchmarks for reducing carbon emissions as set out in the Kyoto Protocol, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (1997),
 - b. Call for continued research into alternative fuels, including production of biogas from organic (wet) garbage, alcohol, and hydrogen and research into electric and hybrid cars,
 - c. Urge energy conservation by use of solar panels, wind farms, and other means, by imposing stricter mileage requirements on all classes of motor vehicles, and by improving access to and availability of public transportation, and
 - d. Further conservation efforts, such as reforestation, innovative land and water use, desalination plants, and biological methods of water purification.