

# *After Sandy:*

## Coping with Disaster, Climate Change and the “New Normal”

Parashat Hayye Sarah, 5773

יִזְכֹּר שָׂדֵה עֶפְרוֹן, אֲשֶׁר  
בְּמַכְפֶּלֶה, אֲשֶׁר, לִפְנֵי מִמְרָא:  
הַשָּׂדֶה, וְהַמְעָרָה אֲשֶׁר-בוֹ, וְכָל-  
הָעֵץ אֲשֶׁר בַּשָּׂדֶה, אֲשֶׁר בְּכָל-גְּבֻלוֹ  
סָבִיב.

**Gen 24:17** So the field of Ephron, which was in Machpelah, which was before Mamre, the field, and the cave which was therein, and all the trees that were in the field, that were in all the border thereof round about...

לֵךְ וַיִּטֵּעַ אֲשֶׁל, בְּבֵאֵר שֶׁבַע;  
וַיִּקְרָא-שֵׁם--בְּשֵׁם יְהוָה, אֵל  
עוֹלָם.

**21:33** And Abraham planted a tamarisk-tree in Beer-sheba, and called there on the name of the LORD, the Everlasting God.

You could argue that the Jewish people have been thinking about sustainable energy ever since God spoke to Moses out of a bush that burned but was never consumed. Moses was perhaps the first environmentalist: He recycled his staff into a snake, got Egypt to turn off all its lights for three days, and convinced an entire nation to go on a 40-year nature hike.

Nigel Savage of Hazon

“Look at the work of God, for who can rectify that which he has damaged” (Ecclesiastes 7:13) – At the time when God created Adam, He took him around the trees of the Garden of Eden, and He said to him, “Look at My works, how beautiful and praiseworthy they are! Everything that I created, I created for you; take care that you do not damage and destroy My world, for if you damage it, there is no one to repair it afterwards!”

(*Midrash Kohelet Rabbah* 7:1)



# Isabella Freedman JEWISH RETREAT CENTER

Dear Friends,

At Isabella Freedman, we love trees so much that we hold an annual birthday party for them.

And so, when a **100-plus year old, 80-foot tall pine came crashing through the roof of our main building**, ripped by the powerful forces of hurricane winds, we were filled with emotions.

Shocked by the damage to our campus.

Saddened by the loss of a majestic friend.

And awed by the strength that it took to hold up that tree for over one hundred years, surviving through gales and storms and who knows what other challenges to provide shade and comfort and a symbiotic relationship with senior adult campers, Teva day school children, and tens of thousands of others who had found relaxation and refuge in its midst.

Perhaps one reason that we love trees is that Isabella Freedman itself is much like that tree. Nearly 120 years old, majestic, providing comfort, facing its own gales and challenges, and continuing to stand proudly in harmony with the many who pass through our gates.

In the hours since our 80-foot friend came crashing through our home, much has happened already. The massive trunk has been impressively extracted from our Great Hall. Debris is being cleaned up. And plans are quickly being designed for repairs, much by the hands of our wonderful Isabella Freedman staff community.

We lost a 100-plus year old friend, but Isabella Freedman itself is a tree that will weather this storm, as it has weathered so many others. We'll look to the strength of our roots, find ourselves centered on the many rings of our proud history, and prepare to bear fruit once again.

Thank you for your love and concern at this time of challenge and triumph.

We pray that all of our Isabella Freedman family who have been impacted by Hurricane Sandy are finding safety, comfort, and some sense of normalcy after what were, for many of us, harrowing and chaotic days.

Best Always,

David I. Weisberg, Executive Director



## The New Normal - *LOSING 100 YEAR OLD TREES*



## UNDER THE TAMARISK TREE THE ESHEL TREE IN OUR BIBLICAL HERITAGE Nogah Hareuveni

What is the *eshel* tree that Abraham planted and why did he select it over other trees? In many places in the vicinity of Beersheva a certain tree stands out. From afar its thick crown looks like grey-green pillows. Its heavy shade attracts passersby, shepherds and their flocks. One of its Arabic names is *athal*, very much like the Hebrew *eshel*; in Latin *Taramix* sp.; in English tamarisk.

Anyone sitting in the morning shade of the tamarisk feels its pleasant coolness. If the sojourner raises his eyes to the tree's branches, he will be surprised to discover shiny droplets of water on the thin branchlets. These droplets, most plentiful after a humid night, evaporate towards noon. A lick of the tamarisk's branches reveals its secret: tiny salt crystals are exuded by the tree into the leaves. At night as the moisture increases in the cooler air, the water vapor adheres to the hygroscopic salt particles and condenses into droplets. With morning, as the sun warms the air, the water evaporates and so cools the tamarisk's branches.



And he planted an *eshel* in Be'er Sheva, and he called the place in God's name — *El Olam*.

It appears that the Patriarch Abraham did not simply plant any tree upon arriving in Be'er Sheva for a lengthy sojourn. He chose a tree whose shade is cooler than that of other trees. **Moreover, the *eshel* can withstand heat and long dry spells by sending roots deep down to find underground water.** Not surprisingly, the *eshel* remains to this day in the vicinity of Beersheva, its ancient biblical name preserved by both nations sprung from Abraham: the descendants of Ishmael and the descendent of Isaac.

Source: <http://jhom.com/topics/trees/eshel.htm>

**THE NEW NORMAL: *Maybe trees need to evolve to grow deeper roots.....***

# The New Normal: *Adaptation to Natural Disasters*

## Hurricane Thoughts and Volunteer Opportunities

November 1<sup>st</sup> 2012 / 16<sup>th</sup> Cheshvan 5773

Dear All,

Both for the East Coast as a whole, and for us as an organization, this has been a week of improvisation in the wake of Hurricane Sandy – and we're hardly out of the thick of it yet. With Lower Manhattan – including our office building – having been flooded and power out (according to a neighbor, Maiden Lane "basically was the East River"). The New York staff are working from laptops and coffee shops, volunteering where they can. They have been home, with and without power, with and without kids, doing what they can. **Overall, I'm struck by the incredible spirit of generosity and community that has taken over New York as those more fortunate help out those in need.**

As I write, the US death toll from Hurricane Sandy is now at 75 people. More than 6,000 New Yorkers are at shelters instead of their homes. **The cost in terms of destruction, of homes and buildings, is obviously enormous.**

As awful as it is, I hope that this hurricane will mark a turning point in how, as a society, we react to climate change. It should now be clearer that there are actually **two quite distinct sorts of changes that we need to make. The second of the two is the obligation we owe to future generations. Reducing the amount of carbon and methane that we emit will not make any difference to the weather in the next two decades, and perhaps longer. But from a generational perspective it will make a difference.** If historians a century hence are able to write: *the world's response to climate change was "too little, too late" until Hurricane Sandy finally triggered real change*, then this Hurricane will ultimately have done some good. I hope and trust that the next President of the USA will be someone who acknowledges the reality of climate change and leads the country in a new direction.

The other sort of change is what's known as "**adaptation**." We will need to re-organize our societies to adjust to the new world in which we live. I'm writing this from Israel, where the post-Succot rains have – again – not come. I was very impressed when I heard President Shimon Peres talk last year about why you don't see Jaffa oranges any more in England or the US. The reason is that, as he put it, "exporting oranges is like exporting water" (**because growing oranges requires a huge amount of water for irrigation**). **Israel took the decision not to spend valuable water in a way that made no strategic sense for the country. There are a slew of decisions like this that we will have to think about in coming years.**

Nigel Savage, Executive Director, Hazon

# What Can We Do?

Rabbi Rachel Grant Meyer lives in Brooklyn. She was born and raised in New Orleans, and during Hurricane Katrina she watched from New York as her beloved city--and her beloved parents--got pummeled by one of the most devastating storms the world has ever known.

Last week she lived through Hurricane Sandy.

She posted hurricane preparedness tips and humorous updates about her activities on facebook throughout the storm, and she watched as the wind howled and the waters rose. After two horrible days, once the storm had finally passed, she looked outside and found a mess. Some people had no power, some had no food, and some had no homes.

She wanted to help. She went to the store, and because there was no gas and the subway was down, she asked to borrow a SHOPPING CART and started schlepping food and supplies to people who needed it.

She emailed a few friends and asked if they wanted to donate money.

They emailed their friends.

That was yesterday. She's now up to \$4053 from 68 people.

(She ended up using someone's minivan instead of the shopping cart after the first few trips.)

Rachel is my friend, and she is a beautiful, kind, vulnerable human being. I love her deeply, and I see her schlepping as both a personal healing process and a part of a huge communal healing process that has the potential to heal the entire world. I imagine what it would be like if everybody pushed as hard as they could to help when they saw our planet in need, and for just one second I think I glimpse a healthier world.

If you want to donate to Rachel, you can give her money at RachelGMeyer@gmail.com via paypal. If you don't have a paypal account, it's really easy to set up. Just click the little navy blue button, etc. She's calling this process #Blankets4Brooklyn. I'm calling it Olam Ha Ba.

<http://www.jewishboston.com/JoJo/blogs/4145-what-is-a-jewish-response-to-climate-change>

## Ways to Help

- Donate to a local park - NYC parks were very hard hit, and they are essential
- Repair the World's advice to help
- Donate money - UJA has set up a Hurricane Sandy Relief Fund
- Give Blood - the New York Blood Center needs about 2,000 donations/day to meet demand
- Donate to the Red Cross
- Support Isabella Freedman

## Volunteer Opportunities

- Opportunities to Help from the Huffington Post
- Opportunities from Jews for Racial and Economic Justice
- Volunteer with NECHAMA
- Opportunities to help from WNYC

- Sign up with [New York Cares](#) for volunteer opportunities in your area
- Volunteer opportunities from the [Occupy Sandy](#) network
- [Lower East Side Recovers](#)
- [Red Hook Recovers](#)
- [Staten Island Recovers](#)
- If you have medical and/or mental health training: join the [NYC Medical Reserve Corps](#)

## **The New Normal: *Alternate Sources of Energy to Reduce Global Warming***

# Religious Action Center in Israel

<http://blogs.rj.org/rac/2012/11/05/israel-environmental-roundup/#more-10957>

When the East Coast of the United States suffered the impact of Hurricane Sandy, environmental concerns once again gained mainstream attention. And in the spirit of such a renewed focus, we thought it was worthwhile to roundup some recent headlines relating to Israel's environment.

Three stories rose to the top of Israeli environmental news this week, including plans to build massive waste to energy recycling facility, a new report on Israeli pesticide use, and a new joint energy research initiative between Canada and Israel.

1. Israeli officials announced a new initiative to build two new facilities that will recycle waste into energy. The proposed facilities would be the largest of their kind in the Middle East, each promising to recycle roughly the same amount of waste created in Tel Aviv.
2. According to the Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS), Israel uses more pesticides than any other Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) country. According to the CBS report, which measured pesticide use between 2008 and 2010, Israeli farmers used an average of 3.5 tons of pesticides for every 1,000 hectares of cultivated land. In contrast, the next highest nation in terms of pesticide use was Japan, which averaged 1.55 tons for the same amount of land. Israeli officials have claimed that the report is misleading because it does not take into account more recent trends in pesticide use, yet this study represents the most current data available.
3. Ministers in both Canada and Israel announced the establishment of a joint energy research cooperation. The initiative, meant to support scientific research collaboration between the nations, aims to simultaneously bolster the already strong ties between Canada and Israel. As a part of the endeavor, Canada pledged \$5 million in research funding, while Israel will tailor resources to the individual needs of each undertaken project.

Jewish tradition emphasizes the importance of environmental stewardship. We are taught that "human being was placed in the Garden of Eden to till it and tend it" (Genesis 2:15), and that the human domain over nature does not include a license to abuse the environment. While the report on Israeli pesticide use is disconcerting, the other headlines provide encouraging news that Israel is working towards a greener future.

## The New Normal – *Dealing With Catastrophic Loss*

כֵּן וַיֹּאמֶר, בָּרוּךְ יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי  
אֲדֹנִי אֲבִרְהָם, אֲשֶׁר לֹא-עָזַב  
חֲסִדּוֹ וְאֱמֶתוֹ, מֵעַם אֲדֹנִי;  
אֲנֹכִי, בַּדֶּרֶךְ נָחֲנִי יְהוָה, בֵּית,  
אֲחֵי אֲדֹנִי. 24:27 And he (Eliezer) said: 'Blessed be the  
LORD, the God of my master Abraham, who  
hath **not forsaken His mercy and His truth**  
toward my master; as for me, the LORD hath  
led me in the way to the house of my master's  
brethren.'

"Listening intently to the text, one can detect the tone of renewed hope, the undertow of despair confronted, in the servant's gratitude... Azav is the word for both "abandonment" and "binding together," "consolidation." Andre Nahar writes, "Abandonment and ingathering belong together, not because of the compensating healing effect of the passage of time, but through the inner dialectic of their inseparable relationship."

Seeds have been scattered, all seemed fallen apart; but in the disintegration, the servant now recognizes not only the denegation of *lo azav* (*He has not abandoned*), but the harmonic of affirmation, the promise of a new equilibrium, a new *emet* to be initiated by Rebecca's entry into the Abraham's world. It is as though the metabolic balance of the family is now to be readjusted."

Avivah Zornberg, "*Genesis: The Beginning of Desire*"

"In the primeval narrative of Genesis, the wind brought about a separation of waters, and then a separation of water from dry land. We're seeing before our eyes an undoing of this primal act of order. Sandy is a return to primordial chaos. Instinctively we recognize it - or at least my dogs do. We only need to pull ourselves from our electronic devices and look out the window.

The Hebrew word for wind is *ruach*, which also means "spirit." In Judaism, the meteorological and spiritual are deeply intertwined. The experience of a storm is a profoundly spiritual one, even in our day. Perhaps *especially* in our day, since, even when we can pinpoint well in advance what will happen, we are completely powerless to stop it. The weather is one of the few things left that reduces us to mush in the face of its power. It makes us realize how insignificant we really are.

Insignificant - and interdependent.

All we have is one another right now. And our hope in the God whom the ancients envisioned riding on this spirit-wind, and whom we imagine giving us the strength to overcome its impact."

Rabbi Joshua Hammerman

# A Prayer in the Aftermath of a Devastating Storm

by Menachem Creditor

*Elohei ha-ruchot, God of the Winds,*<sup>1</sup>

Fixated as we are by incalculable losses in our families, our neighbors, human beings spanning national borders, we are pummeled into shock, barely even able to call out to You.

We are, as ever, called to share bread with the hungry, to take those who suffer into our homes, to cloth the naked, to not ignore our sisters and brothers.<sup>2</sup> Many more of our brothers and sisters are hungry, homeless, cold, and vulnerable today than were just a few days ago, and we need Your Help.

We pray from the depths of our souls and we pray with the toil of our bodies for healing in the face of devastation. We join our voices in prayer to the prayers of others around the world and cry out for safety. We look to the sacred wells of human resilience and compassion and ask You for even more strength and hope.

God, open our hearts to generously support those determined to undo this chaos.

God, be with us as we utilize every network at our disposal to support each other. Be with First Responders engaged in the work of rescue as they cradle lives new and old, sheltering our souls and bodies from the storm. Be with us and be with them, God.

Be with those awaiting news from loved ones, reeling from fire, water and wind that have crippled cities, decimated villages, and taken lives. Be with all of us, God.

Be with us God, comfort us, and support us as we rebuild that which has been lost. May all this be Your will. *Amen.*

<sup>1</sup>Numbers 27:16

<sup>2</sup>Adapted from Isaiah 58:6-7