



TAKE YOUR JUDAISM FOR A WALK

An Environmental Approach

My dictionary defines ecology as “the relationship of organisms to their environment.” The root, *eco*, is from the Greek word *oikos*, meaning house, the space we inhabit. When we speak of ecology today, however, we generally mean making the world a better place to live in by cleaning it up. I would like to present two approaches to this subject—first, that of two experts in the field, and second, an idea that I had.

There is a delightful little book, but with big ideas, printed on 100 percent recycled paper and called *Greening the Holidays*. Written by Ellen Bernstein and Honey Vizer, it is published by Shomrei Adamah, a Jewish organization that focuses on environmental issues, and whose name means Guardians of the Land. The book will give you constructive things to do with your family, friends, and by yourself to relate the improvement of the environment to all of the Jewish holidays.¹ *Greening the Holidays* costs only four dollars, but an extra donation could easily be recycled, and would help support this very worthwhile organization.

Another way your Judaism can have an effect on your environment, on your neighborhood, is to take it for a walk. Allow me to once upon a time.

Once upon a time there moved into a non-Jewish neighborhood a young family committed to its Judaism and interested in

helping others become more aware. It started in little ways—questions asked, questions answered. For example, one day at the local Swedish bakery, a Friday, the owner was asked, “Excuse me, but do you have any challah?” The baker answered politely, “Who?” A description was offered, friends told to ask the same question, and shortly after that, on a Friday afternoon, in the window of the bakery, there was displayed a challah, albeit one identified as an “egg twist” bread.

Proceeding down the road, my friend gently teased the friendly variety store owner. Why did he not display Chanukah goods? He had just finished an elaborate Christmas window. The next year it appeared, small but proud, followed in the appropriate season by Rosh Hashanah cards.

Soon a specialty food shop opened and its owners duly were asked the famous bakery question, “Where’s the challah?” “Who?” they responded. “The egg twist,” the inquisitor said, yielding slightly. Well, the owners did their homework and now, every Friday afternoon, next to the seven grain bread and whole-wheat croissants, there is a mouth-watering challah, albeit known as a turban bread.

One day, purely by chance, of course, the handy person of the house went into the local hardware store wearing a T-shirt with Hebrew letters. One of the

clerks, an elderly man, paused and, with a grin on his face, said, “I used to know what that meant.” He was told that there was time for him to study again. The Hebrew calligraphy was translated for him as *tikun olam*—to save the world. He smiled and he remembered.

The list became endless, the encounters priceless, a chance to become acquainted and reacquainted with the people of the neighborhood. It was so easy, so natural. My friend started with the staff of life, bread, and made inroads in all subsequent encounters. This sounds too easy or perhaps too slow to rise, a little like bread. The process may be longer, but the results are delicious. Oh, yes, on Rosh Hashanah, the Swedish bakery and the specialty food store both featured round loaves with raisins and they called them challah.

Take your Judaism for a walk; it needs the exercise!

Marilyn Price

Marilyn Price has been telling stories professionally for over fifteen years to audiences of all kinds and always enjoys the telling.

She is a member of the Jewish Reconstructionist Congregation in Evanston, Illinois.

¹ Shomrei Adamah also has other resources for adults, children, teachers, and rabbis. (Shomrei Adamah, Reconstructionist Rabbinical College, Church Road and Greenwood Avenue, Wyncote, Pa. 19095)