

Area clergy sign onto Rabbinic Call to action

GLOBAL WARMING

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Rabbi Arthur Waskow of the Shalom Center being arrested at Jane Fonda's "Fire Drill Friday" protest in Washington
COURTESY PHOTO

MASSACHUSETTS – Five dozen clergy from here and across our region are among the hundreds who have signed onto a "Rabbinic Call" to action that seeks to address "not only the planetary climate crisis itself, but also the power configurations behind that crisis."

"Elijah's Covenant between the Generations to Heal Our Endangered Earth," notes the Philadelphia-based Shalom Center, in a written statement, "contends that this ecological imbalance has been created in large part by unaccountable concentrations of corporate and government power that make change difficult, as well as the disastrous role of hyper-wealth in fueling greenhouse gas emissions."

"Elijah is the harbinger of a future time, a time of peace and harmony among all creatures, peace with earth and with each other," noted signatory Rabbi Victor Reinstein of Nehar Shalom Community Synagogue in Jamaica Plain. "If there is no earth to call home, there is no context in which to create human harmony."

"If there is to be wholeness and peace," he continued, "so economic justice rooted in an economy of peace, inclusion and cooperation, rather than militarism, greed, and



Rabbi Ellen Bernstein

nationalism represents a path to Elijah's Covenant as I have come to sign it and seek its way."

Rabbi Katy Allen of the Jewish Climate Action Network described climate change as a Jewish issue.

"Nothing can be more Jewish than protecting all that was created from the very beginning," she noted. "The Torah begins with the creation of the world and then goes on to enjoin us repeatedly that we are responsible for all those who are vulnerable. Climate disruption impacts the most vulnerable communities hardest, and they are the least responsible. It devastates non-human communities, which bear no responsibility at all. We must continue to be co-creators with the Holy One in protecting and preserving this sacred Earth."

Rabbi Shoshana Meira Friedman connected her signing to the global environmental crisis.

"Climate change is the defining issue of our generation," she noted. "We are the first

to feel its effects and the last to have a chance at slowing it down. Anyone who cares about Jewish continuity must begin to see that there is no robust Jewish community in a world of submerging coastal cities, desertification, and dangerous floods and fires.”

Cantor Vera Broekhuysen of Temple EmanuEl of Haverhill stressed the impact of climate change on the next generation.

“I signed it because as a Jewish spiritual leader, in a religion that prioritizes continuity, how much more should we work to ensure that there is a livable earth into which our children and their children can grow?” she asked.

“I want my kids to grow up with clean water and air, birdsong in their ears, and life all around them,” she continued. “I signed because every person deserves that opportunity, and without robust, speedy international cooperation, future generations may not get it.”

The Rabbinic Call provides specific personal and political actions, mandated in ancient Jewish scriptures, which have been translated into contemporary actions. These include urging banks and politicians to invest in renewable wind and solar energy; reforesting and defending natural wildlife refuges; welcoming refugees who have fled storms, floods and famines caused by global warming; adopting modes of kosher practice for foods and energy sources that heal the planet; and joining the campaign to enact a Green New Deal that weaves millions of well-paid jobs, social justice, and eco-sanity into one program.

In addition to Rabbi Allen, other initiating signatories from our region include Rabbi Ellen Bernstein of Shomrei Adamah (“Keepers of the Earth”) of western Massachusetts; Rabbi Arthur Green of Hebrew College Rabbinical School; and Rabbi David Seidenberg of [NeoHasid.org](https://www.neohasid.org).

Rabbi Bernstein discussed why climate change a Jewish issue.

“The climate crisis, the environmental crisis is a crisis of entitlement,” she noted. “We believe we are entitled to take whatever we want from the earth and there will be no consequences. The Torah is a book about consequences. In the beginning, Adam and Eve took of the apple tree, a tree that didn’t belong to them. They didn’t recognize there would be consequences for their actions – that they would be cast out of the garden, out of the fertile life giving world.

“Today, like Adam and Eve,” she continued, “we behave as if we are entitled to the body of the earth, and we continue to extract the earth’s riches, taking of its fruits,

taking more than we need – blind to the consequences. We are oblivious to the fact that the earth has a life of its own, and if we continue to live recklessly – thoughtlessly extracting and polluting with no care for the future, with no thought for our children – the earth will spew us out.

“The Torah teaches that living on eretz/the earth/the land is contingent on our right livelihood,” she noted. “We must live honorably in relationship to the earth and all of her creatures and peoples, so that all may enjoy life.”

Rabbi Bernstein looked forward to Elijah’s Covenant having widespread effects.

“Hopefully, the fact that 500 rabbis have signed Elijah’s covenant will translate into more serious environmental action throughout the Jewish community,” she noted. “We are facing a global-wide climate emergency and only a World War II scale mobilization effort can protect humanity and the natural world.

“All of us as individuals and the Jewish community as a whole needs to make the environment – the climate – the most important issue on our agenda,” she added, “and act with our intelligence, ingenuity, influence, philanthropic dollars and heart towards climate solutions.”

Rabbi Bernstein suggested Jews interested in taking action to oppose climate change should visit theclimatemobilization.org, theshalomcenter.org, hazon.org, jewishclimate.org or jewishearthalliance.org.

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