Living Waters: Jewish Sources on the Natural World for Reflection and Study During the High Holidays

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In the same hour that the Holy Blessed One created the first human being, God guided the person before all the trees in the Garden of Eden and said: See My works, how fine and excellent they are! Everything I have created, I created for you. Think about this carefully so that you do not corrupt and devastate My world: For if you corrupt it there is no one to repair it after you. Ecclesiastes Rabbah 7:8
Why Jews Should be Against Hydrofracking

Hydraulic fracturing (or hydrofracking), the controversial method of drilling for natural gas, is in the news - the Jewish news. The Forward recently reported that 4 Jewish summer camps have signed leases to allow gas companies to drill for gas on their land. The children who attend these camps are in danger, but so are all of us.

The High Holidays are a time of deep reflection on ourselves, our relationships with others, and our relationship with the earth that sustains us. This year, the threat posed by hydrofracking deserves our attention.

There is a gas rush on around the world, including in Texas, Oklahoma and other states. But now it is poised for a huge expansion. Hydraulic fracturing has come to the Marcellus Shale, the largest natural gas formation in the United States, which extends from New York to West Virginia.

People who live near gas wells are already suffering from poisoned wells and dirty air. But we should all be worried for the following reasons:

- Hydrofracking taxes water resources and pollutes water. It requires the use of toxic chemicals, brings radioactive elements in the rock to the surface, and results in contamination by gas.
- Hydrofracking is exempt from many environmental laws due to years of lobbying by the industry.
- Hydrofracking supports our economy’s addiction to fossil fuels. Although cleaner burning than coal and oil, natural gas is a fossil fuel that releases greenhouse gases into the atmosphere to contribute to climate change.

As Jews, we are sensitive to the ethical implications of hydrofracking. We value life above all else, and place limits on what we are allowed to do for profit. We are obligated to protect the poor and vulnerable who suffer first from unregulated exploitation of natural resources. We recognize our responsibility to safeguard the earth for our children and grandchildren. The expansion of hydrofracking cannot be aligned with these values.

The movement against hydrofracking is growing. You will be hearing more and more about it in the coming year. We hope that these thought-provoking insights from Torah will encourage you to learn more about hydrofracking, educate your community, and get involved in the movement against this destructive practice and for a clean energy future.

For more information:

Drilling Down series on hydrofracking, The New York Times

Fracking Comes to Jewish Summer Camp, The Forward
http://forward.com/articles/139831/

Living Waters Sources, Elul 5771 www.JewsAgainstHydrofracking.org
What is Hydrofracking?

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Hydraulic Fracturing

Hydraulic fracturing is a natural gas extraction process by which water, usually mixed with highly toxic chemicals, is forced down a drilled well at extremely high pressure to create or expand fractures, releasing gas trapped in rock formations. Proppants (small particles such as sand or synthetic beads) hold open the newly-created fractures so that released gas can flow toward the well. The process is also known as fracking or hydrofracking.

When drilling for gas in geologic formations where the gas is tightly bound in rock ("low-permeability gas reservoirs"), hydraulic fracturing is used in combination with horizontal drilling, in which the drill bit is gradually turned sideways to penetrate long distances away from the vertical well bore (hole). Because of the very large quantities of water and pressure needed for this process, it is called horizontal drilling / high-volume hydraulic fracturing, or HD/HVF.

HD/HVHF is an industrial activity and the areas where it is used become polluted industrial zones. Rural areas are often exploited, but suburban and urban areas are increasingly subjected to an invasion of heavy equipment and dangerous activities.

Water

HD/HVHF gas wells can require anywhere from 1 to 9 million gallons of water per "frack." Wells have to be re-fracked approximately every 5 years to restimulate production. Such high water use creates issues such as where to obtain it, traffic and pollution from getting hundreds of heavy truckloads of water to the drill site, deliberate contamination of the water, and trucking all of the wastewater away to be disposed of somewhere. Wastewater must be stored onsite at least temporarily, leading to repeated problems with leaks and overflow during heavy rains. Additionally, ancient "formation water" may be released in the well completion process. This 'brine' is typically far saltier than seawater and presents serious disposal issues. Spills and other unintended releases are inevitable industrial accidents. Clandestine dumping is widely suspected and has been reported.

Chemicals & Sand

The chemicals used in hydraulic fracturing are known to cause a wide variety of health problems. Increasingly, reports from affected areas indicate a prevalence of serious and incurable disorders in people and animals living near natural gas extraction or transmission facilities (pipelines and compressor stations). Even the special sand used as a proppant has a destructive effect on the communities where it is mined.

Regulation

Over decades, the oil and gas industry has lobbied for and gotten exemptions from a wide
array of federal laws, including laws requiring environmental impact statements, laws regulating hazardous waste and toxic site cleanup, laws requiring reporting of toxic emissions and laws to protect the air and drinking water. The industry lobbies to keep nearly all regulation at the state rather than federal level, saying that the states do a good job of regulating. The evidence strongly suggests otherwise.
Abraham’s Well: Preserving the Waters of Life for our Children and Grandchildren
(Rosh HaShanah Torah Reading)
Rabbi Howard Cohen

Now swear to me here by God that you will not deal falsely with me, with my children, or with my grandchildren. Show to me and the land where you were an immigrant the same kindness that I have shown to you.’ ‘I will swear,’ replied Abraham. Abraham then complained to Abimelekh about the well that Abimelekh’s servants had taken by force. Abimelekh said, ‘I don’t know who could have done such a thing. You never told me. I heard nothing about it until today.’ Abraham took sheep and cattle and gave them to Abimelekh, and the two of them made a treaty.

Abraham then put aside by themselves seven ewes of the flock and Abimelekh asked Abraham, ‘What is the meaning of these seven ewes that you have set aside?’ ‘Take these seven ewes from my hand,’ replied [Abraham]. ‘It will be my proof that I dug this well.’ That area was therefore called Beer-sheba, since the two had made an oath there. They thus made a treaty in Beer-sheba. Abimelekh and his general Pikhol then left, and they returned to the land of the Philistines. [Abraham] planted a tamarisk tree in Beer-sheba, and there he called in the name of God, Lord of the Universe. (Genesis 21:23-34)

Pardon the pun, but I think this often overlooked passage has potential to be “mined” for interesting teachings on hydro-fracking and other environmental issues. For example, it opens with a multi-generational ethic in mind: "swear to me ... that you will not deal falsely with me, with my children, or with my grandchildren". This evokes the famous words of Oren Lyons, Chief of the Onondaga Nation: “‘We are looking ahead, as is one of the first mandates given us as chiefs, to make sure and to make every decision that we make relate to the welfare and well-being of the seventh generation to come...” "What about the seventh generation? Where are you taking them? What will they have?"

Coincidently, the ancestral lands of the Onondaga once sat on top of, or were very near, the Marcellus Shield [the site of a good deal of hydro-fracking today]. There is a land ethic implied when Abimelekh says "show to me and the land...the same kindness". It is not common to find concern for the land put on the same level as concern for humans. Then there is an issue of unjust land and water appropriation as indicated by Abraham's complaint that his well was stolen. This is followed by the familiar responses of denial and blame by officials when problems surface under their command: "I don't know who could have done such a thing. You never told me. I heard nothing about it until today." Finally, as a sort of bookend to the opening ethic of the land, the passage closes with another land ethic symbol, the planting of a tamarisk tree. Alas, even this seemingly green move is nuanced by the fact that the tamarisk tree Abraham planted represents its own environmental challenges (see http://www.misterchad.com/tamarisk.htm), thereby bringing us back to the opening ethical value of thinking through decisions as many generations ahead as possible.
Take a Bath (Like the Priests) and Think About Water
(Yom Kippur Torah Reading)
Rabbi Howard Cohen

4 He shall put on the holy linen tunic, and he shall have the linen breeches upon his flesh, and shall be girded with the linen girdle, and with the linen mitre shall he be attired; they are the holy garments; and he shall bathe his flesh in water, and put them on.

24 And he shall bathe his flesh in water in a holy place and put on his other vestments, and come forth, and offer his burnt-offering and the burnt-offering of the people, and make atonement for himself and for the people.

26 And he that lets go the goat for Azazel shall wash his clothes, and bathe his flesh in water, and afterward he may come into the camp.

28 And he that burns them shall wash his clothes, and bathe his flesh in water, and afterward he may come into the camp. (Leviticus 16:1-34)

I live in Vermont. Unless you live in a vacuum you know that we experienced devastating floods this summer caused by heavy rains from Hurricane Irene. In no more time then it takes to turn on or off a faucet, life sustaining water turned deadly and destructive. I've also been very focused on the potential dangers to our drinking water that hydro-fracking poses. So this year as I was reviewing the high holiday liturgy and torah readings I was particularly sensitive to water references. In the Yom Kippur Torah reading I was struck by the four references to water cited above. What can I draw from the fact that there are four distinct sets of instructions involving the need to "bathe his flesh in water"? After all, the semi arid region where this teaching is set is one where water is scarce and not to be wasted on excessive bathing. Yet here we have the Torah explicitly requiring the priest to bathe his flesh in water not once but four times! As I understand this, it does not mean that he splashed a little water in his face or dipped his fingers in water. To be sure, there are many possible responses to this question. However, it occurred to me that these four water references in the Yom Kippur Torah reading subtly remind us that water gives life, sustains life, brings death in its absence or overabundance, and is used for purposes of purification. It also made me think about how much water we actually need and use. I imagine that it required many, perhaps hundreds, of gallons of precious water for the priest to properly wash in order to fulfill the rituals described above. If so much water is needed just to perform a ritual by one priest imagine how much water is needed to sustain life for the entire community. Of course there are many more associations that one might make with these four seemingly incidental water/washing references in the Yom Kippur Torah. What might be some of yours?
The traditional Haftorah reading for Yom Kippur afternoon is the book of Jonah. The main themes consider one’s response to hearing God’s call to responsibility and the possibility of repentance. Or simply put, it’s about how to not run away from God. To quickly recap, Jonah is told by God to travel to the land of Nineveh—an arch enemy of Israel, and tell the people to repent or God will destroy them. Jonah runs away from the call, doing his best to avoid responsibility. He thinks that at best he will be thought a fool for warning Nineveh and at worst may be blamed for its demise. Eventually he lands in Nineveh and warns the people they will be destroyed unless they repent. To his surprise they do, God relents and the people are saved.

My understanding and interpretation of the concept of God’s call is to deeply listen to, and hear what we know to be right. Our challenge: do we or don’t we do it? Do we not do it because we think we will fail, look foolish, or provoke anger? These are some of Jonah’s reasons.

The first step in hearing any call is the ability to listen, to hear, and to pay attention. In my experience this part is not so easy. There are a variety of reasons—internal and external—for why it is difficult to hear God’s call—the call to what is right. It is the spirit that calls us to do what is right.

Today that call is to listen to the earth. I firmly believe that the eco-system that is planet earth—the web of life that we live within—is in grave danger. The greatest species extinction in 60 million years is taking place. Take this in for a moment. Life forms that are in our web of life are dying never to be seen again. Thousands of acres of forest a year are being lost—picture/feel the death of a tree... Thousands of acres of land are becoming desert. Rich moist soil is becoming dry and useless. Glaciers that have provided water for all forms of life are disappearing. I won’t continue enumerating the ways of dying. We all numb ourselves to it. We each have ways of not listening. And listen we must in this moment in history. This is the time for the Primal Sh’mah, the Great listening to the Earth. And it is hard to listen.

We live in a culture that is predicated on not listening to the earth. If western society listened to it we wouldn’t be in the shape we are in.

Feelings of our connection to the earth became deeply repressed. The more we strove to produce material goods the deeper the repression. The logical endpoint of repression of feelings has resulted in psychic numbness—cultivated in a culture where people operate at hyperspeed, are constantly bombarded with diversions and lured into addictions of food, sports, media, prescription drugs, tobacco, and alcohol that prevent us from feeling the pain of what is happening to the earth—the earth which is a part of our psyches—our very being.
When Thich Nat Hahn, one of the greatest Buddhist activist in the world today was asked “what is the most important act that we can do” he answered, “What we most need to do is to hear within ourselves the sound of the earth crying.”

I know from my own experience and that of others, that when we listen deeply enough to the plight of our living planet, the giant organism that we are a part of, we feel the sadness and pain. And from an intellectual perspective, I know that current science teaches us that every part of the system contains the whole system within it- fractal theory or holograms- we are a hologram of the earth. That means that when a part of the Earth dies, a piece of ourselves dies as well. We each need to ask and feel what in me is dying....

Sadly, another part of the earth right now is under assault by the process of hydro-fracking. It is a process of injecting at high pressure a highly toxic liquid solution to dislodge natural gas from the earth. It threatens to contaminate our drinking water, and send toxins and chemicals into our streams and rivers.

Healing Waters of the House of God
(Ezekiel 47)
Dr. Adriane Leveen

At the end of his extraordinary prophecy, Ezekiel offers us a portrait of a people restored to its land at whose center is the rebuilt House of God. Miraculously, water comes pouring out of the House of God and flows east and south, becoming deeper as it goes. A land long desolate and dry will be reborn. The water from God’s house has extraordinary properties, even sweetening foul waters….

“Every living creature that swarms will be able to live wherever this stream goes. Fishermen shall stand beside it all the way from En-gedi to En-eglaim; it shall be a place for drying nets; and the fish will be of various kinds...most plentiful, like the fish of the Great Sea...All kinds of trees for food will grow up on both banks of the stream. Their leaves will not wither nor their fruit fail; they will yield new fruit every month, because the water for them flows from the Sanctuary. Their fruit will serve for food and their leaves for healing.” (47: 9-12).

This image of pure and fresh healing waters parallels and ensures the successful restoration of a living people in a land of their own after years of exile. The properties of the water heal a desperate people- -spiritually, but also literally giving them sustenance. Different elements of the natural world come together in an extraordinary interdependence- -waters and fish, all kinds of trees for food- - and in so doing, restore the health of the land and the people who reside upon it.

But in our time we might not be offered such a second chance. If we pollute and contaminate our waters, there will be no healing, no fruit nor abundance of fish...
The Return of the Healing Waters of Eden: Redemption and Hydraulic Fracturing (Ezekiel)
Rabbi Lawrence Troster, Rabbinic Scholar-in-Residence, GreenFaith

The High Holidays are a time in which the theme of redemption both personal and communal is central to the liturgy of the Mahzor. Personal redemption comes through teshuvah, repentance; communal redemption is the collective act of teshuvah; both help to bring about the universal redemption of the whole world (Tikkun ‘Olam).

One the most important and vivid visions of redemption is found in the last chapters of the book of Ezekiel which the prophet had after the destruction of the First Temple in Jerusalem in 586 BCE. He was in exile in Babylon but he was granted a prophecy of the future restoration of the Temple. In chapter 47, Ezekiel is shown a great deep river, full of fish, flowing out of the new Temple eastward down to the Dead Sea, which will become a body of sweet water. The Judean desert on either side of the river will become fertile and blossom with fruit trees that will never cease to give fruit and be filled with all kinds of animals.

This vision is meant to show how the future Temple will become the new Garden of Eden. And the new covenant with God will now assure that the land will not have to depend on chancy rain. Freshwater will always flow from the Temple Mount, and the Gihon spring of Jerusalem will return to its original character as one of the primordial rivers of Creation (see Genesis 2). In other prophetic texts (Zechariah 14:8; Joel 4:18) there are two rivers that flow from the Temple: one eastward toward the Dead Sea, one westward toward the Mediterranean.

The metaphor of fresh living water as a sign of redemption is used quite often in the Bible, especially in the books of the Prophets. God is in fact called the mekor mayim hayyim, Fountain of Living Waters. The scarcity and intermittent nature of fresh water in the ecosystems of the Land of Israel helped to create this theology. The abundance or scarcity of rain was not considered to be a random natural occurrence dictated by changes in geography or climate, but a divine response to a human moral crisis. There is no “nature” separate from human concerns, and there is no “natural evil”; Israel and the Land of Israel are bound together in one moral community under God’s direction. This idea is also found in rabbinic sources. For example, in the Babylonian Talmud (Rosh Ha-Shanah 17b) there is a direct connection made between the behavior of the Jewish people and the amount of rain that God will bring for the coming year.

Many of us live in communities where fresh clean water is taken for granted until it is disrupted. We expect that access to clean water is a basic human right but there is a growing crisis in the world over the access to freshwater. The main causes of the shortage of freshwater are the rapid increase in world population in the last hundred years, resulting in a lower per capita amount of available water; an increase in contaminated water from human effluents, and an increase in the rate of water consumption per capita as countries develop. Modern agricultural methods, power generation, and industrial use cause pollution, which also lowers available clean water for human consumption. Yet
despite the large presence of water on Earth, clean freshwater is a precious substance, comprising only 3 percent of the total. It is a finite resource.

For these reasons, we must oppose hydraulic fracturing. It destroys sources of fresh water, it uses large amounts of fresh water and the carbon-based energy produced by it is causing sea levels to rise which is contaminating critical river delta’s that supply millions of people with food. Fracking is a transgression against God’s Creation, delaying the redemption of the world. If we are to create the world of Ezekiel’s vision, we must oppose this destructive procedure and allow the living water to continue to flow.

**Water: Wellspring of Life or Ecological Disaster?**
Rabbi Arthur Waskow

The biblical tradition reminds us that in a time and place of scarce water, wellsprings are oases not only for the life of the body but also of the blessing of the whole soul/person. For Hagar and Ishmael, for Abraham, for Isaac and Rivka, for Jacob and Rachel, for Moses and Tzipporah, wellsprings brought new life, new possibility, new fruitfulness. It was no accident that when Pharaoh’s arrogance and stubbornness brought plague after plague upon Egypt — each an ecological disaster — it was the water of all Egypt that was the first to suffer.

Today great stretches of our planet are suffering from scarcities of water comparable to the biblical Middle East; yet the Pharaohs of Big Oil are using, poisoning, whole river systems and threatening both the local wellsprings of farm communities and the drinking water of great cities for the sake of burning fossil fuels and swelling their enormous profits.

Fracking must stop until we have ascertained what the secret poisons are that are shattering Marcellus shale, and then can decide how to protect the waters of our region and the climate of all Earth.
Appreciate the Gift of Life-giving Water
(Psalms)
Dr. Adriane Leveen

Psalm 104 beautifully celebrates the life-giving importance of water. The psalmist observes that we humans are clearly only one of the beneficiaries of this divine gift. All creatures - - beasts, birds and humans, and all plants-- fruit, grass and herbs- - require God’s water as well. The psalm offers us a picture of a world that is inextricably linked together to create a life-sustaining planet.

You make springs gush forth in torrents;
They make their way between the hills,
Giving drink to all the wild beasts;
The wild asses slake their thirst.
The birds of the sky dwell beside them
And sing among the foliage.
You water the mountains from Your heights
The earth is sated from the fruit of Your work.
You make the grass grow for the cattle,
And herbage for the human’s labor
To get bread from the earth
Wine that cheers the hearts of humans
Oil that makes the face shine
And bread that sustains our lives
The trees of the Lord drink their fill… (Psalm 104:10-16a, trans. from the Jewish Publication Society)

All that we need comes from water - - bread, fruit- - and all that gives us cheer- - wine and oil. But the world is not there only to sustain us. The trees too must drink their fill… Our joys and our strength come from water. It is a gift that we must cherish, for without it we can not survive. And yet, the humans that we are, we dare to drill and hydrofrack. We dare to contaminate that divinely given water with toxins and chemicals…

Indeed, a different Psalm is familiar with what happens when our life-giving water becomes contaminated…

He turns rivers into a wilderness,
Springs of water into thirsty land,
Fruitful land into salt marsh,
Because of the wickedness of its inhabitants…(Psalm 107:33-35)

How powerfully are the images of this Psalm juxtaposed with those from Psalm 104. Water with all its life giving properties can be turned into its opposite- - spoiled and salty. Such water can leave a land bereft. Of course the psalmist sees salt marshes and stretches of land barren of water as God’s punishment. But we know differently. We know that these waters can turn to salt, robbed of their life giving properties, not because God wills
it, but because we do it. We extract water deep from inside the earth without being fully aware of the consequences and without taking the most exhaustive of precautions. We turn fruitful land into salt marsh.

Where is Wisdom to be Found? (Job 28)
Rabbi Lawrence Troster, Rabbinic Scholar-in-Residence, GreenFaith

Most scholars believe that chapter 28 of the book of Job is a later poetic addition into the text. The poem is nonetheless a beautiful hymn to Wisdom (Hokhmah) and a meditation on how to acquire it. The unknown Wisdom teacher who composed this poem is warning us that we cannot find wisdom in the ingenuity of human activity, which can even encompass searching the depths of the earth through the mining of precious metals and jewels.

*Man sets his hand against the flinty rock and overturns mountains by the roots. He carves out channels through rock; his eyes behold every precious thing. He dams up the sources of the streams so that hidden things may be brought to light.* (Job 28:9-11)

The poem is suggesting that the nature of humanity is to seek wisdom in all the wrong places, and to assume that human technology is somehow an expression of understanding. It asks rhetorically:

*But where can wisdom be found; where is the source of understanding? No man can set a value on it; it cannot be found in the land of the living.* (Job 28:12-13)

Real wisdom is not a commodity; it cannot be bought and sold. Only God knows where real wisdom lies: *Fear of the Lord* which is moral consciousness. From this basic moral foundation, the learning of true wisdom can begin.

The message strikes me as one that is particularly important and poignant in light of what is being done to the earth with hydraulic fracturing. Energy is the modern world’s most precious commodity on which we all depend. But it is like an addictive drug: We are willing to go to any lengths to find it and we constantly want more and more of it whatever the impact on the natural and human environments. And it is assumed that the search for new energy sources is the wisest course to take as a society. But this is false wisdom and has led to corruption, injustice and ecological degradation.

Where can real Wisdom be found? We must begin with understanding what is right and just and not try to tear apart the depths of the earth, overturn mountains and destroy the sources of precious water.
What You Can Do

There are many opportunities to take action against hydrofracking. The industry is decentralized and the practice is regulated at both the federal and state levels. Cities are taking action by banning fracking. Check the websites below for the latest information on what you can do in your area. More information will be available soon on our website: www.JewsAgainstHydrofracking.org.

Educate your community
Talk about hydrofracking during the High Holidays. Publish one of the brief articles in this packet in your newsletter. Ask your social action committee to explore this issue. Plan a screening of Gasland, a documentary about hydrofracking:
http://www.gaslandthemovie.com/

New York
A moratorium on fracking has expired, but drilling has not begun and activists continue to push for a total ban. Meanwhile, the public will have several opportunities to voice concerns about fracking as regulations are considered. In early September the NYS Department of Environmental released its Environmental Impact Statement and public hearings will be held around the State in November. Find the latest information on what you can do at: http://unitedforaction.org/category/action-alerts/

New Jersey
At the end of August, Governor Christie vetoed a ban on fracking passed by both houses of the New Jersey legislature. http://newjersey.sierraclub.org/

Pennsylvania
3,000 wells have been drilled in Pennsylvania, but activists continue to push for a ban. For updated information on actions you can take:
http://protectingourwaters.wordpress.com/category/take-action/

Ohio
A moratorium bill has recently been introduced in the state senate. For more information: http://chej.org/nofracking/

Other States
Fracking is taking place in many other states as well. Check with local environmental organizations to find out what you can do.

National
A panel appointed by President Obama recently issued a report on hydrofracking, and the EPA is currently conducting a study of the impact of fracking on water. The FRAC Act, which would reverse the exemptions for fracking from environmental laws, has attracted some support. Sign and circulate a petition for a national ban on fracking:
http://action.foodandwaterwatch.org/p/dia/action/public/?action_KEY=6125&track=hp-051811-actioncenter