

T'Green Olam - Passover 2011 - Our Accomplishments To Date

2011 began with a one, two, three and maybe even four punch, pummeling us with cold and snow. Join us as we take a few minutes to look forward to Spring and some upcoming celebrations. Every year, we celebrate Passover, commemorating our people's liberation from slavery over 3,000 years ago by retelling the story of our Exodus from Egypt. Every year, we have the opportunity to find new meaning in that story. This year Earth Day falls during Passover, providing an opportunity to focus on the connection between the story of our liberation from slavery and the current struggle to liberate ourselves from individual and societal patterns that are destroying our environment. Earth Day and Passover also provides us with a special opportunity to reflect on how we have incorporated caring for the earth into so many facets of our communal life at Beth Rishon.

Let's start here and look at some of the things we have accomplished.

1. Our leadership, including: the clergy, the president, our Board of Trustees and our professional staff has all embraced the concept of "Tikkun Olam" and have made caring for the earth part of our everyday activities at Beth Rishon.
2. We have a strong and vibrant Environmental Committee, T'Green Olam, which is continuing to implement and discover opportunities that can make our community more environmentally sensitive and our practices more sustainable.
3. GreenFaith, the national interfaith environmental organization, honored us with an award for outstanding achievement. In the first 12 months of our energy-saving initiatives we reduced our electricity consumption by over 30%.
4. Our Hebrew School has conducted discussions on environmental issues, conducted a compact florescent bulb sale that resulted in the highest sales for a religious school in NJ, and sold reusable shopping bags. The school is working with us to plan our planting of a community garden this coming Mitzvah Day.
5. Our office is using only recycled paper.
6. Our custodial staff has stepped up our recycling program Temple-wide.
7. We have two sets of reusable coffee mugs which we use at most functions, which have avoided substantial expenditures on disposables, while avoiding generating trash.
8. Our ongoing energy initiatives will reap substantial benefits for our budget and the environment. Watch for announcements about our second 12-month period of savings in early March. Will we match last year's pace?

Passover is rich with teachings we can use to live more sustainably and happily on earth. One of the names for Passover is *Z'man Chay-Ru-Tay-Nu*, the time of our freedom. As we go through this holiday, let's think about the degree to which we are enslaved by our desire for material things. Let's think about what it costs us as individuals, families, and communities to pursue the lifestyles to which we've become accustomed. Let's think about what our real needs are and how they might be satisfied at less cost to each other and to the rest the planet. Let's think about who our "Pharaohs" are - the forces in society and within each of us - that make us want more and more. Let's think about who our "Moses" are - who, within and around us, can help us break out of patterns of over-consumption and materialism?

One of Passover's lessons is learning to distinguish between more and enough. Dayenu means "it would have been enough for us." Often, enjoying more wealth and comfort stimulates our desire for more - attention, comforts, money, more, more, more. Passover and the Haggadah teach us to be mindful of what our real needs are, of what constitutes "enough."