

BEING MINDFUL

We are approaching Thanksgiving, a nonsectarian American holiday, a holiday that all Americans embrace. At this uncertain, yet hopeful time in America, we as Jews should use this opportunity as we recount what we are thankful for, to carefully consider our impact on our environment. Every action we take has impacts – some obvious, some less so. Being mindful of these consequences illuminates the decisions we make and the impacts we create. Considering the consequences of our behaviors, buying decisions and consumption patterns as they impact the environment falls within the scope of “green living”. The votes we cast with our wallets set into motion a series of events that impact the economy, the environment, the allocation of resources, and the health of workers involved in production, to name a few.

Economic uncertainty may cause us to reconsider big purchases like cars, appliances or other energy consuming products. But mindful decision making applies to any purchase we might make. Take a moment when you read through this discussion to think about everything you buy, and potential impacts on our environment.

Lifecycle analysis examines the chain of events triggered by a product. It factors the cost of extracting raw materials, the costs and consequences of transporting those materials to manufacture, energy expended to transform the materials into a product (sometimes called embodied energy), the costs to transport finished goods for sale, and so on. The analysis goes all the way to the end costs of recycling or remanufacturing the expended product into reusable components. And costs are not limited to dollars: production that releases toxins into the environment includes health costs and environmental costs not easily quantified. This analysis is based in mindfulness – awareness of issues beyond the obvious.

There is no example for consequences above and beyond our wallets more globally dramatic than buying gasoline. At the risk of stating the obvious, when we consume gasoline;

- Wealth is transferred to foreign governments and withdrawn from our domestic economy
- Pollution is created.
- Climate change is accelerated through combustion as well as the direct addition of greenhouse gases to the atmosphere.
- Oppressive regimes are empowered both politically and financially.
- Funding is channeled to destabilizing political factions such as religious fundamentalists by those oppressive regimes.
- Geopolitical relationships are impacted.

Collective wealth has promoted a pattern of consumption limited only by economic means. Values rarely factor into purchasing decisions as processing and manufacturing facilities, relocated internationally, have become physically isolated from our decision-making processes. We need to rectify this disconnected outlook because the consequences of our purchases are strongly linked to outcomes that extend far beyond our credit card statements.

As citizens of the world each of us votes with our wallet every day. As Americans, and Jewish Americans in particular, it must be clear that possessing the economic means to afford gasoline in the short term doesn't give us the right to consume it indiscriminately. We need to invest in alternative and renewable forms of energy, as the world is running out of oil and gas, we need to look for a 21st century solution to our 20th century problem.

Think carefully about your next automobile purchase. Consider the “buy American” motto. Which car is more “American”, the Ford built in Canada or the Toyota built in Kentucky? Is a 15 mpg “American” car better for our country than an efficient “foreign” one? How will our purchases impact national security? The consequences of these decisions extend way beyond our wallets. In fact they extend, quite literally, around the world and back again. These are not “environmental” issues, nor are they politically partisan issues.

Mindful decision making can be exhausting. It certainly takes more work. But it's a necessary task to be a fully engaged member of society. Americans are playing a high stakes game until we secure energy independence. For Jewish Americans the stakes are even higher.