

What Makes Food Sacred?

Resources for Jewish Congregations

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Sustainable Shabbat: Greening your Shabbat Dinner

To set apart one day a week for freedom, a day on which we would not use the instruments which have been so easily turned into weapons of destruction, a day for being with ourselves... a day on which we stop worshipping the idols of technical civilization... a day of armistice in the economic struggle with our fellow men and the forces of nature. Is there any institution that holds out a greater hope for man's progress than the Sabbath?

Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel, *The Sabbath*, p.28 (1975)

Below is a list of ideas and resources for creating a Sustainable Shabbat Dinner in the vision of A.J. Heschel, put together by the Teva Learning Center.

Programming

- **Pray Kabbalat Shabbat outdoors** – If weather permits, try praying outdoors and focus on natural symbolism in the prayers
- **Discuss Shabbat as an environmental holiday** - study texts and how to make Shabbat a personal weekly environmental holiday

Logistics

- **Use Non Disposable Dishes** – When possible use real dishes and a dishwasher (or hand washing) with biodegradable soap
- **Use Biodegradable Dishes** – When reusable dishes are not an option, use fully biodegradable dishes which can be composted, or at least not build up in our landfills. Dinnerware is available in a number of forms including corn starch, sugarcane, leaf and more. www.ecoproducts.com
- **Use Recycled Napkins** – There is no reason to wipe your hands or face with newly cut trees. Use 100% post consumer recycled paper napkins
- **Organize Carpools** – If attendants drive to your Shabbat dinner, try organizing a ride sharing systems. Carpooling can be organized through a sign up board, e-mail listserver or through a central coordinator
- **Reduce Energy** – If you are going to leave the lights on for all of Shabbat, replace incandescent light bulbs with CFLs (Compact Fluorescent Light bulbs)
- **Skip the fresh flowers.** Try a sustainable alternative like potted flowers or herbs. At the end of the meal, give your centerpieces as gifts to your guests. If you definitely want flower centerpieces, go organic! www.organicbouquet.com

Food

To reduce the environmental impact of your meal, create a menu that is:

- **Vegetarian** (or at least offers good vegetarian alternatives) – eating vegetarian vs. chicken reduces the environmental effect of a meal more than tenfold. Reduce your use of carbon, land, pesticide and more by eating lower on the food chain.
- **Local** – reduce the carbon footprint of your dinner by buying vegetables and meats produced locally. Try shopping at a local farmer's market. Talk to the farmer, know where your food is grown.
- **Organic** – reduce the health impact on farm workers and protect the farm's ecosystem by buying chemical free organic vegetables, breads and meats. Organic chicken is available from Wise Kosher.
www.wiseorganicpastures.com
- **Cruelty free** - Serve ethically sourced meat. Try buying your meat from the person who raised it (or as close to that as possible).
- **Fair trade dessert** – Everyone loves chocolate & coffee for dessert, make sure you treat your farm pickers well by buying fair trade products. A good kosher supplier is www.equalexchange.com

Kosher Organic Wines and Grape Juice

There aren't many kosher organic wines available, so if you want some you need to plan ahead. Go to your wine store a few weeks early, if they don't have anything, ask them to order a case on your behalf – or order directly online. A few kosher organic wines and grape juice include:

- **Four Gates Winery** – Organic, Kosher and Kosher for Passover, not Mevushal <http://www.fourgateswine.com/>
- **Yarden Chardonnay Odem Organic** – Organic, Kosher, Kosher for Passover, not Mevushal <http://www.kosherwine.com/cgi-bin/ProductInfo.asp?WineID=73604001692>
- **HoneyRun Winery** – Organic, Kosher, not Kosher for Passover, not Mevushal, not grape
- **Glendale Farm Grape Juice:** kosher grape juice local to the Northeast – 607-546-8479.

Acknowledgments

Special thanks in the creation of this document to

- **Hazon** - www.hazon.org
- **Sacred Foods Project**- www.aleph.org/sacredfoods/htm
- **Teva** - www.tevacenter.org

Eco-Kashrut Considerations for event planning

by Mike Tabor, member of Fabrangen, Washington DC 7/18/07

1. Are fair trade items used whenever possible (chocolate, coffee or bananas, for example)?
2. Do the caterers pay their employees a living wage?
3. Are as many items as possible grown locally on sustainable farms? Are mostly seasonal items used?
4. Do the caterers use reusable and recyclable plates, cups and utensils?
5. Will the menu exclude high fructose corn syrup items such as Coke and Pepsi?
6. Do the caterers use sustainably grown meats and fish; are the animals treated (living conditions, grazing) and slaughtered in a humane manner?
7. Are the usable leftovers contributed to shelters or food banks?
8. How does cost and affordability factored into event decisions?
9. Are foods that heal, nurture and sustain given priority over fatty, sugary and fried foods?
10. Does the clean up include clearly marked containers for compost, recycling and reusable items?
11. Does your group have an ongoing educational program aimed at protecting children and adults from unhealthy and exploitive corporate advertising and branding.
12. Is the event accessible via public transportation or has a carpool been arranged?
13. Has much of the food been purchased from food co-ops, local businesses and farmers in bulk?
14. Does the caterer or store avoid purchasing genetically modified and irradiated foods? Does the store in which the food was purchased have such a policy?
15. Is a poem, prayer, blessing or song offered before and after the consumption of the food? Are the servers, and other workers hired for the event publicly acknowledged and thanked?
16. Is the food purchased from a union supermarket or business?

Embodied Energy Teva Learning Center, Nati Passow

A common kavanah, or intention, we often use at Teva before a meal is to have participants look at their food and trace it back to its source. What were all of the steps that allowed the food you are about to eat to get to your plate? From the people who prepare the food moving all the way back to the field in which the ingredients were grown, and the numerous processes in between, there is a lot that allows us to enjoy our daily bread.

This exercise can be eye opening for some, and raises some pretty serious questions for others. First of all, how many of us can accurately trace back the route of our food? How many of us know the name of the farmer who grew the tomato we eat, or the wheat that was used in our Challah? Can we really picture the farm on which the food was grown? Do we even know what country the food was grown in? But why are these questions really important, can't we just conjure up the image of a pristine wheat field, the only sound being the wind blowing softly through the crops, a picturesque red barn somewhere in the distance? We could, but by replacing the truth with a more idealistic story, we cover up potential problems instead of using our awareness as a foundation for taking action.

The term Embodied Energy has been used to describe both the quantity and quality of energy required to manufacture and supply any product, material or service. It can be applied to everything from food to clothes, from building materials to cars. On a pragmatic level such an analysis can often be the difference between a product being truly environmentally responsible or not. For example, an apple grown on a local, small scale farm that uses minimal amounts of chemical pesticides will contain less embodied energy than an organic apple grown on the other side of the country, simply because of its proximity to you, the consumer. Or replacing your mildly inefficient washing machine with a brand new energy efficient model is not always the clear-cut environmentally sensible thing to do because of the all of the energy used to manufacture and ship the new machine. Learning more about the true source and actual path your food or other products take is the first step in making an informed decision about the environmental impact of any one item.

Beyond environmental reasons, there are deep spiritual and moral grounds for tracing something back to its source. First, using the example of food, picturing the actual farm your food was grown on and knowing the name of the farmer adds a depth to saying the bracha in which we recognize the source by delineating between fruit of the tree, fruit of the earth and fruit of the vine. Second, and perhaps slightly more abstract, is the idea that there is actually a difference between eating food that was commercially grown on a large scale, chemically supported farm, in which many workers are underpaid and overworked, and eating food that is grown from a consciousness of both ecological and social well being. Or with respect to clothing, wearing an item that

is produced in a sweatshop is somehow tangibly different than clothes produced in a fair and equitable way.

The concept of Hidur Mitzvah, or glorifying a mitzvah, encourages us to have a beautiful talit, or decorate the sukkah, or have a special tablecloth for Shabbat. It teaches us to take an extra step to make the observance of a particular ritual that much more special. If we remain ignorant as to the sources of our food and clothing and material possessions, we neglect both the effort of those who have labored for our needs, and potentially, are benefiting from the exploitation of other human beings, animals and the planet. Perhaps Hidur Mitzvah should be applied not just to the finished product, but also for the process by which it was acquired. Imagine if we were successful in transforming any religious practice we had into a model for sustainable and equitable consumerism. If all coffee served at our events was fair trade, all food purchased from sources that truly promote sustainable agriculture all clothes certified sweatshop free.

At your next meal, take a moment before you dive in to trace your food back to its source. If you can't trace the actual path your food took, imagine how you think it might look, and imagine how you wished it looked. Enjoy your meal and think about how we might be able to get these two images to line up more closely.

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Good Practices in Congregations

Arlin Wasserman

Congregations can help support better food and agriculture practices through the choices we make about the food we purchase for congregational activities from coffee hours and potlucks to food banks and schools. We can also make a difference by choosing where we buy our food and where we focus our charitable efforts. Here is survey of some good practices that congregations are using:

Purchasing Food

Congregations can purchase foods that are produced in ways that are better for the environment, help improve life for agricultural workers, treat animals humanely, and support ones local economy. Food producers let consumers know about their farming and business practices through certifications and labels such as “organic” and “cage free.” The Sacred Foods Project offers a guide to certification and labeling claims available at www.aleph.org/sacredfoods.htm. From individuals buying food for a social hour to managers choosing what to buy for your congregation’s school, here are a few ways to make your food choices count:

Buy Organic food. Food that carries an organic certification symbol has been grown and processed without the use of synthetic pesticides or fertilizers. Purchasing organic food reduces that amount these chemicals applied to farmland and released into the environment.

Buy Fair Trade™ certified foods. Fair Trade™ certification is applied to foods ranging from coffee and tea to rice and bananas. Under this program, farmers received a fair price, fair labor standards are ensured, and a share of the sale goes to support community development programs in the area where your food was produced. Equal Exchange, a company specializing in Fair Trade™ coffee offers a simple purchasing program for congregations at <http://www.equalexchange.com/interfaith-program>.

Buy humanely raised dairy, eggs, meat and poultry. The Certified Humane Raised & Handled symbol is placed on animal products produced according to the standards established by Humane Farm Animal Care Act? The standards ensure that animals are allowed to engage in their natural behavior, are handled in ways that limit stress, and receive a healthy diet. Farmers also indicate how they raise and handle their animals using terms such as “cage free” or “free range.” To learn more about labeling claims visit www.certifiedhumane.org.

Buy Shade Grown or Songbird Friendly Coffee. Many congregations buy coffee, the world’s most valuable agricultural crop, and coffee growing has spread to many regions around the world. Often, native forests are cleared to make way for coffee plantations, eliminating the canopy of trees songbirds use

as resting places during their migration. Shade Grown and Songbird Friendly coffees are grown using methods that either allow part of the original forest to remain or include new plantings of trees that will grow to produce a new canopy.

Buy food grown by farmers in your community. Buying from nearby farmers keeps your dollars circulating in the community longer and helps to support farmers working in your community. It also reduces the environmental footprint of the food by reducing the amount of oil needed for transport and the amount of packaging needed to protect food in transport. Fresh foods are easiest to find, including fruits and vegetables, dairy, eggs, meat and poultry. You can often find food that is grown in your community either at a farmers market or in your grocery store. If that's not available, look in the supermarket for food grown in your home state or a neighboring state.

Build a relationship with the people who grow and make your food:

Congregations can build relationships with the farmers in your communities, learning more about one another and finding new ways to help each other. You can talk to farmers at your local farmers market or find producers in your area through on line directories such as LocalHarvest.org. Your congregation can choose to host a farmers market, inviting farmers to set up shop in your parking lot, social hall or recreation room following large event. You can also work within your congregation to set up a Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) project, where some households pay a farmer at the start of the growing season for a share of his or her harvest through the year. This provides farmers with the money they need to start the season and households with fresh produce for many months. You find an existing CSA near you at www.LocalHarvest.org. Some congregations also choose to buy food from local farmers to use in their meals programs or food pantries, either at the end of the market day or through a CSA program.

Congregations also can build relationships with people who make food in your community buy working with local restaurants and caterers to provide food for congregational functions. At the end of the day, they may have leftover food available for donation to your congregation's meals program or food pantry. Restaurants making these donations must comply with local, state and federal health and safety laws. A food donation guide for restaurants prepared by the National Restaurant Association and the United States Department of Agriculture is available www.p2pays.org/ref/12/11907.pdf

Case Studies

- Forty churches in Iowa and Wisconsin held Harvest of Hope Farmers Markets between November 2006 and March 2007 under a program started in the Madison, Wisconsin Christian community. The winter farmers' market featured handmade and farmer-owned products from local and regional farmers and small farm cooperatives. The markets help

farm families increase their incomes at the same time that they provide a safety net for other farmers. Ten percent of the proceeds go into a fund to help farmers who face emergency surgery without insurance, power cutoffs leaving livestock without water or augured feed or spring planting without enough money to purchase seed. To learn more about the program, visit: <http://www.cclpmidwest.org/harvestofhopehome.html>

- The Houston Jewish Community Center and Finca Pura Vida (Pure Life Farm) have joined together in a Community Supported Agriculture project, under a national program offered by www.Hazon.org. More than thirty households that are members of the Community Center purchase a share of the farm's seasonal harvest for a fixed price before the growing season begins, ensuring they will receive an ever-changing assortment of fresh, local and organic produce. The farm is guaranteed a stable base of customers and the money it needs for the season ahead. In addition to receiving a weekly box of fruits and vegetables, members of the Community Center also visit Finca Pura Vida to plant seeds and help in the harvest.

Connecting to Farmers Around the World

Some of the food we buy ourselves and in our congregations cannot be grown near where we live and worship. We can use our purchasing power and our donations to help support farmers working around the world, and support sustainable development in impoverished agricultural communities. Several nonprofit organizations offer us an opportunity to make connections with farmers around the world, including:

Heifer International offers a program to let individuals and congregations purchase livestock, tools and technical assistance programs that they will deliver to increase the self-reliance of farming communities across the world. Their on-line catalogue of donations is <http://www.heifer.org/site/c.edJRKQNiFiG/b.204586/>.

Thanksgiving Coffee provides a direct connection between your purchase of coffee and supporting sustainable development project at coffee cooperatives in Latin America, Africa and Asia, including Mirembe Kawomera Coffee, produced by a cooperative of Christian, Jewish and Muslim farmers in Uganda. To learn more about these cooperatives and order coffee packaged for personal or institutional use, visit <http://thanksgivingcoffee.com/>.

Case Study

- The Covenant Presbyterian Church in Atlanta, Georgia has a longstanding partnership with Heifer International that connects congregants with farmers in the U.S. and abroad and increases the effectiveness of its charitable giving to support sustainable development in agricultural

communities. The church's holiday gift market includes Heifer's offerings, where congregants can "buy" livestock, seeds, equipment and technical assistance for a farmer as a holiday gift for someone they know. The congregation also partners with Heifer to lead an adult mission to work with low-income farmers in Appalachia.

Sacred Foods Secular Certification Research

One way that congregations can make positive change in the food and agricultural system is by the kinds of foods they choose for themselves and their institutions. With this in mind, the Certification Committee of the Sacred Foods Project researched food certification programs that specifically address issues encompassed by the Sacred Foods Eight Dimensions (available at: www.aleph.org/sacredfoods/htm). The result is the attached report with its quick scan chart with detailed explanations below on how each program addresses the Dimensions.

In selecting which certification programs to include, we used several criteria. First, we focused on certification programs that identify products in a way that is evident to the final consumer. Second, we selected certification programs that are multi-regional or national in scope. That means that we did not include certifications that might be very good if they were operating only in one city, or one that an industry might use prior to a product coming to market if the consumer would have no way of knowing about it. Finally, we did not look at certifications that addressed issues that are only tangentially related to our Sacred Foods Dimensions, even if they were professionally managed processes that otherwise had merit. For example, the National Heart Association “Heart Healthy” certification was not included.

Our final list includes national and some regional groups that we deemed relevant based on a review of their web sites and our professional knowledge of their programs. We did not do a third party audit of their systems and processes, and we do not hold this document out as an endorsement of their work, but rather as an analysis of how their self-description relates to the Sacred Food Dimensions.

We encourage congregations and religious institutions to use this document as a foundation for discussion and analysis of these and other programs. As with all organizational decisions, reaching communal consensus on whether and how to use information is the strongest foundation for a change in direction.

We recognize that for many, doing additional research on secular certifiers will not be feasible, given your time and resource constraints. We hope that the following information is useful to you in its current form for making more informed decisions about your organizational food purchasing.

If you do choose to do further research into these programs, here are some questions we thought that you as congregations and religious institutions (as opposed to scientists, academics and agricultural professionals) may want to explore:

1. How well does a given certification program's standards address the issues that are important to the congregation?
2. Are there "unintended" consequences that need to be considered? For example:
 - A. Increasing wages and benefits for farm workers increases the cost of produce and results in lost jobs. Large-scale buyers often shift to foreign suppliers with lower labor, operating and regulatory costs. For example, tomato sales from the Immokalee area of Florida fell 60% in the 90's as a result of post NAFTA Mexican imports.
 - B. Low prices result from overproduction. Fair-trade premiums may actually act as a subsidy to encourage more producers to enter the market. This may drive down the price of non-Fair-trade products even further, making non-Fair-trade farmers poorer. It may also limit the money that goes to the lower echelon of large-scale employers that are often prohibited from using the Fair-trade designation.
 - C. Local foods may be less energy-efficient to produce and ship without any economies of scale and may take business away from those in developing countries.
 - D. Organic certification rules allow the use of naturally occurring compounds to be used as pesticides, but forbids most synthetics. In tree fruit production, some organic growers use significant amounts of sulphur to control pests though its toxicity to mammals can be higher than some synthetics.
3. Are the standards actually enforced? How well? What are the standards for auditing and how frequently do audits take place? What are the standards for training and supervising the auditors? How do you evaluate non-numerical standards?
4. Are the standards "scientifically" based, "ethically" based or "anthropomorphically" based? Of what importance is this to you and your community? A "scientific" standard is based on publishable research across a wide range of disciplines that usually results in some sort of scientific consensus. An ethical proposition is based on standards that the community uses to judge other situations. It relies on reasoned analysis and evaluation of differing points of view to come to an informed judgment. An "anthropomorphic" standard speaks to actions or procedures that are not scientifically proven to be unpleasant for animals, but make us uncomfortable because we imagine that what would be unpleasant for humans would be unpleasant for animals.

The certification analysis is found in a separate document, entitled: Sacred Food Certification Tables, at www.aleph.org/sacredfoods/htm

HOW FOOD FRAMES THE FESTIVALS

By Rabbi Arthur Waskow

The cycle of Jewish festivals has become intimately connected with specific foods, and the themes of the festivals lend themselves to focusing on specific aspects of what makes food sacred.

DAYS OF AWE: ROSH HASHANAH THROUGH YOM KIPPUR

Rosh Hashanah is symbolically connected with eating apple slices dipped in honey. The apple evokes the round cycle of the year as it begins, and the honey hopes for its sweetness. The festival focuses on ten days (traditionally known as the Days of Awe) of *tshuvah*/turning one's self in a new direction that culminate in Yom Kippur, a day of not eating or drinking at all.

Jews are already involved in making a *cheshbon ha-nefesh*/ a self-accounting -- during these 10 days. A Sacred Foods inventory could simply be another component of this work. Even before the 10 days that begin with Rosh Hashanah, your congregation or each household within it might:

- Perform an assessment of how and what it eats and how to maximize the "eight dimensions" of sacred food:

- Growing Food in Ways that Protect and Heal the Web of Life
- Treatment of animals
- Protecting the integrity and diversity of life
- No One Should Go Hungry
- Fairness toward and empowerment of workers
- Responsible and ethical forms of business
- Food as an Aspect of Spirituality
- Reflection on our Actions and Impact

One could simply list the eight dimensions above and ask how to increase your level of observance in each of them. For example:

- Dimension One: Healing the earth:

- Can I afford to increase the amount of organically grown foods I eat, especially in the produce most likely to be affected by insecticides (certain fruits and vegetables)?

- Can I reduce the amount of meat I eat? (the UN FAO reports that livestock farming is one of the major contributors of methane to global scorching)

The ancient philosopher Philo Judaeus suggested that one of the reasons for a day-long fast on Yom Kippur is that the entire year's harvest is about to be gathered. Just as we pause in a brief prayer before every meal to bless the

Source of food, so we must pause for the "year-long meal" to pray in a much longer "blessing." As we approach Yom Kippur, each evening we might:

- Single out a particular category of food that is one of the basics of our meals, to honor its Source and recount the process by which it reaches us: bread and grains, fruit, eggs, milk and other dairy products, spices, etc. The recounting could take note of sun, seed, soil, rain, human effort to grow and process and transport and sell and cook and eat it. We could then ask: How are the earth, the workers, the animals, the consumers treated?

On the morning of Yom Kippur itself, the prophetic reading from Isaiah calls for us not only to refrain from eating that day, but to feed the hungry, house the homeless, clothe the naked, and break off the shackles on prisoners. In honor of this directive and in addition to the food inventory suggested above, households or congregations could embark on direct action and policy-change action during the days before and after Yom Kippur, to assure adequate supplies of nourishing food to the poor. Action could include:

- Taking food to nearby soup kitchens
- Inviting the homeless to join the congregation's post-Yom Kippur break-fast
- Organizing congregants the day after Yom Kippur to write letters to city or federal officials urging stronger efforts to abolish hunger.

SUKKOT

Soon after Yom Kippur comes the festival of Sukkot. This is a time for honoring the harvest, preparing for and praying for rain to vivify the next crop, and giving the community an experience of eating – possibly even sleeping – in close contact with the earth through the leafy-roofed hut -- the *sukkah*.

There is an ancient tradition of blessing the prosperity of the "seventy nations of the earth" through this festival, and of welcoming guests into the *sukkah*. In keeping with this tradition one might:

- Host an interfaith gathering to celebrate the sacredness of food and the earth's bounty, where questions of the role of food in different communities of faith could be examined together. You might explore questions like:

How do our different communities address these questions?

How do our different communities face the danger that earth could lose its fertility through global scorching, or through the failure of species that are key to food production (endangerment of the North America honey bees that fertilize most crops, for example)

- Visit communities of farm workers harvesting various crops and try to

experience their lives and learn from their efforts at unionization and other aspects of ensuring justice in farm work.

The last day of *Sukkot* and its follow-on festival of *Shmini Atzeret* address the need for rain to fructify the earth. Here some of the issues of climate crisis, pollution and its dangers to food production and the just sharing of food, including issues of expense, could be addressed. You might want to:

- Do a teaching on these topics
- Set up lobby visits on pending legislation
- Change congregational practices around water use (e.g.: creating a grey water system that allows for water recycling and re-use)

Along with the *sukkah*, one of the key symbols of *Sukkot* is a cluster of four plants -- date palm branch, willow branch, myrtle branch, and *etrog* (citron) that are held and "waved" together, symbolizing all the forms of vegetation that nourish life. The shapes of the four are understood to replicate the Hebrew letters of one name of God – "YHWH" – but they are held in an order that replicates the Name only if someone other than the waver is watching them being waved. Thus they teach how it takes an "I-Thou" relationship to embody the Divine energy that fills this nurture.

In many ways this teaching underlies the entire concept of the sacredness of food. To help lift it up even further, one might:

- Invite congregants after waving to sit in their *sukkah* and discuss how to make food more sacred by inviting God's name to appear in it through improvements in purchasing, eating and the sharing of food.

HANUKKAH

The next major Jewish festival is *Hanukkah*. In rabbinic tradition, it is centered on the story of olive oil that lights the Temple Menorah. In the story, one day's olive oil miraculously suffices to keep the Menorah lit for eight days, while fresh oil is being consecrated.

An examination of the Torah's description of the original *menorah* in the *mishkan* (wilderness sanctuary) shows that it was rooted in the anatomy of a living tree, and the *Hanukkah* prophetic reading from Zechariah envisions a menorah that receives its oil directly from two olive trees, one on each side of the great lamp.

The menorah was seen as a mixture of living tree and human artifact, bearing light precisely because it fuses *adam* (human) with *adamah* (earth).

The very word *messiah* means "anointed with oil" and this is one of the ways we know that olive oil has a profound theological significance. Perhaps the idea is that the oil that comes from a living plant reduces friction and lights up the world

is necessarily the gift of the messiah who honors all life, reduces all social /political friction, and enlightens the world.

This aspect of *Hanukkah* has traditionally lent itself to cooking with olive oil, celebrating olives and making connections between earth's abundance and human cookery.

In our time, since we know that the over-use of oil and coal threatens our very existence by disrupting climate patterns and in turn disrupting a great many of the earth's agricultural practices, additional actions at *Hanukkah* could include:

- Doing an energy audit of the congregation's heating, lighting, and transportation;
- Making a major, visible, and publicizeable change in its energy sourcing and usage;
- Organizing congregants to join in a "Green Menorah Covenant" for their own household action, taking some of these actions on at home;
- Initiating adult and teen education sessions on global scorching and its prevention;
- Founding an "Oiloholics Anonymous" group of congregants to share the struggle to shed addiction to oil, and help back-sliders;
- Carrying out social advocacy for change in public policy on energy by putting together congregational delegations to lobby public officials, picket corporate or labor organizations, etc.

TU B'SHVAT

In mid-winter, Jews celebrate the invisible renewal of life in trees as the sap begins to rise. The full moon of the month of *Shvat* honors the rebirthing not only of trees but also of the Divine Tree with its roots in Heaven and its fruitfulness manifested in our very existence.

The festival is celebrated through a sacred meal made up of fruits and nuts. Its eating requires the death of no life-form, not even a carrot or a radish. The meal is the meal of Eden.

This *Tu B'Shvat Seder* meal is also traditionally shaped by the Four Worlds of Jewish mysticism, symbolized by earth, water, air, and fire, giving an opportunity to address the healing of those four elements and therefore the healing of the earth.

Connecting this to the Sacred Foods dimensions, we have the opportunity to teach and take action on how to heal and protect the Web of Life on our planet, drawing on our farms and fields and oceans for sustenance without destroying the life in them. We are not likely to eat in this fruitarian way at every meal throughout the year, avoiding the killing of any individual life-form. But we can honor the *Tu B'Shvat* meal by taking on the joyful obligation to preserve and protect the collective life of each and every species, animal and vegetable, from voracious human appetites. Along these lines one might:

- Hold a *Tu B'Shvat seder* interwoven with education and action options presented to protect the earth and the animals.

PURIM

In the story of Esther that accompanies the festival of Purim, there are two nights of festive dinners that become the venue for Esther's exposure of the tyrant Haman and her convincing the king to prevent genocide. How can we use the sharing of food to create a sense of community in which all communities are sacred? Just before the raucous celebration of Purim begins, when we are still in the space that tradition delineated as the Fast of Esther, commemorating her courage in committing nonviolent civil disobedience to grasp the king's attention, we could:

- Share an otherwise silent meal in which we hear poetry about the earth, farmers and farm workers, cooks, and the delights of nourishing food.
- Stand vigil at some center of danger to healthy, plentiful food.

PESACH

Passover is the consummate festival of food. For a full week Jews take on an entirely distinct system of *kashrut*, in which all leavening and leavened foods are forbidden. This in itself demands attention to food as an aspect of spiritual and religious life. The original intent seems to have been (at least in part) to experience the most basic and primitive of all human foods, just as *Sukkot* calls forth the most basic and primitive of all human dwellings.

Just as living under a tree fails to fulfill the precept of building a *sukkah* for *Sukkot*, eating a bitter herb straight from the soil is necessary but not sufficient for *Pesach*. We are the most technological of animals, and we must use our technology in each of these festivals. For *Pesach*, we must bake *matzah*. It requires that one of the earliest feats of human technology – fire – be brought to bear on the simplest of ingredients (flour, water, heat) without flavoring or leavening.

This teaching is thoroughly obscured by a modern development: the invention of foods that fulfill the traditional requirements of *kashrut* for *Pesach* through mechanical production, but end up being elaborate '*kosher*' analogues for almost

every conceivable dish. Rarely indeed do these dishes convey the sense of early shepherd or barley-farmer.

What to do? Reopening the primordial sense of *Pesach* food and experiencing a much more direct relationship with the agricultural world could prove powerful and might transform attitudes toward growing, cooking and transporting food. It would also render the relationship between food and labor far more apparent. Along these lines one might:

- Try living for a week on home-baked *matzah* and rough-hewn vegetables and a bit of roasted meat if you are not a vegetarian.

At Passover's heart is the legend of a slave uprising against brutal tyranny. The foods themselves become ideas, demands, feelings, of the oppressed. As one of the night's Four Questions hints, how do we create a society where all can recline while they eat? How do we transcend the ancient warning that human beings would have to work in sweated face to grow just barely enough food beyond the thorns and thistles of rebellious earth? This question comes into sharp focus on Passover, and we are invited to remember the first post-Exodus story. In it, time for rest – the Sabbath – comes with freely given food – the *manna*. How to broaden this legend into life could become a central concern of the Passover ritual. This could happen before Passover when people gather to bake *matzah*, or at the *seder* table itself, perhaps on the second night, as counting of the Omer begins. Along those lines, one could:

- Give a brief dramatic unfolding (drushodrama) of what we imagine were the biblical community's responses to *manna* or about the transformation of *matzah* from the bread of affliction to the bread of freedom. (In a drushodrama, people actually take on the roles of characters in the traditional story – named and unnamed, Moses and a young mother in the tribe of Judah, etc. – and interact with each other as their own understanding of the moment moves them, rather than talking **about** the story.)
- The telling of the departure from Egypt, the core of the *seder*, could be enriched and embellished with stories of recent or contemporary oppression and liberation in fields and fisheries and slaughter-houses.
- Passages from modern classics of "food ethical consciousness" like Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle* could be interspersed with passages from the traditional *Haggadah* as well as relevant passages from biblical, rabbinic, and modern Jewish texts.

MAIMOUNA:

For centuries in Morocco, Jews have brought Muslims the first food for the great break-fast festival of Eid Al-Fitr, at the end of Ramadan – and Muslims have

brought Jews the first leavened bread at the end of Passover. Jews called this "ninth night" *MAIMOUNA*, from the word for prosperity. A modern take with a Sacred Foods twist on this tradition might invite Jews, Muslims, and Christians everywhere to:

- Share the different foods of different locales and traditions, affirming the shared and overlapping traditions of what is permissible to eat, learning with each other and enjoying the joyful celebratory contact with each other.

COUNTING THE OMER

For fifty days beginning the second night of Passover, we walk through the anxiety of uncertainty about whether first the barley crop and then spring wheat will flourish and whether we will be able to receive the harvest of the Torah as we stumble our way toward Sinai.

In these seven weeks of "Counting the *Omer*," we can learn how risky is our abundance and learn to celebrate how the weave of sun, seed, soil, and rain meshes with human work and our joyful journey in community. As we count, we learn how this mesh embodies the Divine inter-breathing of all life, and calls forth from the deepest Source of Being the rules and patterns of how a sacred community of earth and earthling can live together.

In *Kabbalistic* tradition, the seven weeks were understood to invoke seven manifestations of God, called the *spherot*. These are:

Chesed (overflow of lovingkindness);

Gevurah (rigor in boundary-making);

Tiferet/ Rachamim (the synthesis of the first two: strength that pours forth compassion);

Netzach (Perseverance)

Hod (Delight)

Yesod (Connection)

Malkhut (Ingathering / Summation)

In each of these weeks, congregants might:

- Gather for one evening to eat together and to address the aspect of food that is involved in each of the weeks. For example, for *Chesed* you could discuss outreach to the poor. For *Gevurah*, regulation to prevent poisoning of the earth and those who eat the food. For *Tiferet*, you could celebrate your community's successes on this work or plan for how your community could achieve a success by bringing together its restraining energy (*gevurah*) with its outpouring energy (*chesed*) to create beauty and harmony (e.g.: when it saved money on utilities through its energy audit and donated the savings to feed the hungry.) For *Netzach*, how the

congregants learned to persevere; for *Hod*, how they learned to infuse hard work with joyful celebration; etc.

SHAVUOT

Tradition teaches that as we approach Sinai on the festival of *Shavuot*, we give up meat and live on the mammalian generosity that betokens *El Shaddai* – the Breasted God. Torah pours from Heaven like milk from Godly breasts; so we recognize our childlike hope of nurture by eating cheese and sour cream and yoghurt. How can we celebrate this Source more concretely? We might:

- Invite celebration of the roles of "Mother Earth" and of women in farming, cooking, feeding, discussing how not to reproduce gender stereotypes into the future.

TISHA B'AV

As we move into the summer time, heat and thirst begin to overtake us. After several dawn-to-dusk fast days to recall painful moments of our wounding, we become full refugees – bereft of food and water and other pleasures for an entire day as we remember the ancient death march of refugees to Babylon. Once again food and water – or their absence – take the central place in our awareness. How might we make this holy day more powerful and relevant to the current struggles our world faces around food and water? We might:

- Connect our lives with those of modern refugees – the women of Darfur, for example, who must venture dangerously further and further to find the meager wood to cook their meager meals, and commit to giving support to them through campaigns like the solar cooker campaign.

After *Tisha B'Av* we complete the cycle of the year, moving toward the time of transformation as the smell of distant rain renews our spirits, and *Rosh Hashanah's* apples and honey bring new hope (Evening Sept. 29, 2009)

THE SONG OF SONGS AS A SACRED RECIPE: "CHAROSET" & THE LIBERATION OF THE WORLD

By Rabbi Arthur Waskow

In Jewish tradition, eating food is a sacred act – and there are a series of concentric circles in which the intensity of the attention paid to food and the sacredness felt in food increases.

To begin with, food is defined as sacred by specifying some foods that are permitted (kosher) for Jews to eat and some that are forbidden (treif). Thus every meal is preceded by an unspoken question -- Is this food kosher? -- and the need to consult, explicitly or implicitly, a sacred text in order to answer the question.

Secondly, Jewish tradition calls for all eating to be preceded and followed by blessing the One Who creates the various forms of food. The forms of the blessing differ depending on what sacredly defined category the food belongs to (bread? sweetcake? wine? fruit of a tree? fruit of the earth? something else?)

Not only does this act of blessing itself infuse the eating with sacredness; it requires understanding of the sacred categories into which food is divided.

For one week a year – the week of Passover, beginning with the full moon of the lunar month nearest the spring equinox – the whole process is elevated to an even more intense level. For during that week, no "leavening" or "souring" agents (yeast, vinegar, etc.) or foods they have infused (bread, distilled and fermented alcoholic drinks, most pickled foods, etc.) are permitted in the household.

Not only can they not be eaten; they cannot be owned – not even a speck of them. So every household that abides by this tradition is obligated to do a minutely thorough spring cleaning, getting rid of practically all the regular food of the previous year (except for fresh fruit and vegetables). This process underscores the sacred potential in food.

And then, on the first night (or in most households, the first two nights) of Passover, the sacredness of food reaches its apogee in these concentric circles. There is a still more intensely heightened requirement: There are certain foods that must be eaten that evening, and for some of them, the traditional sacred text for the eating of this Passover meal explains why they must be eaten.

One is matzah -- unleavened bread, made only of flour and water with no flavorings and baked swiftly according to certain stringent rules. It was the bread of the desperately poor, and on the night of the original Exodus had to be baked in great haste, before the dough could rise. Hence eating it is a sign of both

poverty and transformation. Another is a bitter herb, often raw horse radish, to recall the bitterness of slavery.

Among the others is a dish called charoset, and this one is not explained — in fact, it is mentioned only indirectly – in the written Passover Haggadah, or "Telling." Though unmentioned, undescribed, and unexplained, its necessity is passed on by word of mouth, so strongly that it appears in every Seder throughout the Jewish world. Its precise recipe varies from one Jewish culture to another, but the basics are clear: It is a paste made up of chopped fruit, chopped nuts, spices, and wine.

Charoset is mentioned in the Haggadah only by utter indirection. Four Questions, traditionally asked by the youngest person present, help initiate the Telling of the Passover story of the Exodus of ancient Israel from ancient Egypt. After asking, "How is this night different from all other nights?," the Four Questions point out: "On all other nights, we do not 'dip' even once; on this night, twice."

The first of these two "dippings" is dipping green vegetable in salt water. This is heralded in the sacred text by a blessing for the Source of this fruit of the earth. The second dipping is dipping a piece of matzah in charoset. Participants in the Seder know this, but the text ignores it. There is not even a special blessing for the eating of charoset.

So let us ask the unasked question: --- "Why is there charoset on the Seder plate?"

The conventional answer, transmitted by word of mouth, is that the paste of charoset reminds us of the mortar that Israelite slaves were forced to use to hold together the stones and bricks of Pharaoh's storehouses as they slaved to build them.

But charoset is sweet. If it mimics the mortar of slavery, it must also remind us that slavery may taste sweet, and this is itself a deeper kind of slavery.

But it seems to me there is a still deeper meaning of charoset. I think it is an embodiment of the sacred text that is perhaps the most "subversive," certainly the most fully embodied, book of the Hebrew Scriptures -- the Song of Songs. Charoset is literally a full-bodied taste of the song. The Song bears the recipe for charoset, and the absence of any specific written explanation of charoset is itself a secret pointer toward the "other" liberation of Pesach – the freedom celebrated in the Song.

The Song of Songs is sacred not only to Jews, but also to Christians and to Muslims, and especially to the mystics in all three traditions. Its earth-and-human-loving erotic energy has swept away poets and rabbis, lovers and priests, dervishes and gardeners.

Yet this sacred power -- "Love is strong as death," sings the Song -- has frightened many generations into limiting its power. Redefining its flow as a highly structured allegory, or hiding it from the young, or forbidding it from being sung in public places.

Even so, long tradition holds that on the Shabbat in the middle of Passover, Jews chant the Song of Songs.

Why is this time of year set aside for this extraordinary love poem? At one level, because it celebrates the springtime rebirth of life, when the flowers rise up against winter -- just as Passover is a celebration of rebirthing freedom, rising up against Pharaoh.

And the parallel goes far deeper. For the Song celebrates a new way of living in the world.

The way of love between the earth and her human earthlings, beyond the future of conflict between them that accompanies the end of Eden.

The way of love between women and men, with women celebrated as leaders and initiators, beyond the future of subjugation that accompanies the end of Eden.

The way of bodies and sexuality celebrated, beyond the future of shame and guilt that accompanies the end of Eden.

The way of God so fully present in the whole of life that God needs no specific naming (for in the Song, God's name is never mentioned).

The way of adulthood, where there is no Parent and there are no children. No one is giving orders, and no one obeys them. Rather there are grownups, lovers -- unlike the domination and submission that accompany the end of Eden.

In short, Eden for grown-ups, for a grown-up human race.

Whereas the original Garden was childhood, bliss that was unconscious, unaware, the Garden of the Song is maturity. Death is known, conflict is recognized (as when the heroine's brothers beat her up), yet joy sustains all.

Now what does it mean to say that the Song of Songs is the recipe for charoset?

Verses from the Song:

"Feed me with apples and with raisin-cakes;

"Your kisses are sweeter than wine;

"The scent of your breath is like apricots;

"Your cheeks are a bed of spices;
"The fig tree has ripened;
"Then I went down to the walnut grove."

So the "recipe" points us toward apples, quinces, raisins, apricots, figs, nuts, wine. Within the framework of the free fruitfulness of the earth, the "recipe" is free-form: no measures, no teaspoons, no amounts. Not even a requirement for apples rather than apricots, cinnamon rather than cloves, figs rather than dates, offering an enormous breadth for the tastes that appeal to Jews from Spain, Poland, Iraq, India, America.

FURTHER EXPLORATION:

Rabbi Arthur Waskow, co-author, *The Tent of Abraham and Director, The Shalom Center* www.shalomctr.org, which voices a new prophetic agenda in Jewish, multireligious, and American life. <http://www.shalomctr.org/subscribe>

For Passover and its focus on food, and for other recipes connected with it, see Rabbi Arthur Waskow, *Seasons of Our Joy* (Beacon).

Rabbi Shefa Gold has created a CD, "Shir Delight," that brings her chanting melodies into the Song. You can order the CD by clicking to -- <http://rabbishefagold.com/ShirDelightOrders.html>

Rabbi Phyllis Berman and I have woven from our own embroidery on the Talmud's telling a visionary tale of healing, a tale of how the Song became a part of our sacred treasury. <http://www.shalomctr.org/node/1249>

For a fuller outpouring of this way of hearing the song, click to -- <http://www.shalomctr.org/node/1194> and read GODWRESTLING - ROUND 2 (now available at half-price -- \$12.95) from The Shalom Center. Write us at 6711 Lincoln Drive Philadelphia PA 19119, enclosing a check for \$12.95 per copy plus \$3.50 per package, to cover postage.

WHAT MAKES FOOD SACRED

A study in 8 Dimensions

The following is the summary of an interfaith discussion about what makes food sacred according to the three Abrahamic traditions. It is organized according to eight dimensions. It covers a wide spectrum of issues wherein there is some disagreement. The term “dimension” is deliberately used to express the existence of a range of different views and teachings within each of the traditions. Each of the eight dimensions are drawn from four sets of sources from the classic texts of the three traditions: The Hebrew Bible, the Talmud, the Christian Scriptures or New Testament, and the Qur’an and Sunnah. The full document, with all scriptural quotations, can be found at www.aleph.org/sacredfoods/htm.

Preface: The Web of Life.

We celebrate God's creation of a self-sustaining web of life in which plants, animals, land, water, air, and human beings are interwoven. There are many relationships in this web that can heal or damage the web itself. Among these, food production is one of the more significant forces. So we must choose ways of producing food that protect and heal the web of life.

Dimension 1. Growing Food in Ways that Protect and Heal the Web of Life

Food production, as one of the more significant forces in the natural world, affects the delicate balance of plants, animals, human beings, land, water and air – interdependent in seeking sustenance and survival. Farming and grazing together occupy one quarter of the world’s lands and are the leading cause of deforestation and loss of natural lands. In order to maintain this balance for future generations, we human beings must choose to produce our food in ways that protect the web of life, preserve the living spaces that other life-forms need, and learn to use methods that return vibrant health to our soil and water. Some strands of our traditions focus on finding ways to produce food for an ever growing human population without continuing to encroach on natural and sensitive areas, and others focus on limiting human populations.

Dimension 2. Humane Treatment of animals

All our traditions agree that animals must be treated humanely and their suffering minimized. Some strands of our traditions focus on using animals for food through methods of maintenance and slaughter that minimize suffering; others suggest vegetarianism.

Dimension 3. Protecting the integrity and diversity of life

The ways in which we produce food must respect the integrity and diversity of the world’s plants and animals, as well as taking active steps to prevent the extinction of animal species and plant. Some strands of our traditions emphasize concern for the integrity of the genetic line of plants and animals; others strongly

encourage putting considerable effort into increasing food production and developing the health-giving properties of foods. Even when these values may seem to conflict, our choices should be guided by the principles listed above.

Dimension 4. No One Should Go Hungry

All our traditions share a strong commitment that no one should go hungry at the end of the day. This applies especially to the poor and times of famine. Everyone should have access to affordable, nutritious, and culturally customary food. Each local community and the world-wide human community acting in concert share the responsibility for ending hunger and famine. Our traditions present a range of opinions about how best to do this. Most strands strongly encourage very localized and decentralized approaches (e.g. gleaning); some strands describe highly centralized approaches (e.g. Joseph's solution to famine in Egypt). It seems likely that both approaches will be taken in today's world, though the question remains whether it is better that we aim policy toward one over the other or strive for a balance between them.

Dimension 5. Fairness toward and empowerment of workers

All our traditions agree that workers must be treated fairly, justly and humanely. One out of every six people works to provide the food we eat – in the fields and in food transport, in restaurants and food preparation, and in food stores. We affirm their right to decent incomes, working conditions, and to organize themselves.

Dimension 6: Responsible and ethical forms of business

All our traditions require that we act honestly, fairly, to the benefit of others, and in accordance with the ethical teachings of our faith traditions when dealing with customers, employees, partners, and the communities in which we conduct business. These relationships must be accessible to public scrutiny and accountability. The specifics of how we conduct responsible and ethical business relationships, as well as the meaning and implications of accountability to the public, may be reflected in different ways by the various strands in our traditions.

Dimension 7. Food as an Aspect of Spirituality

All our traditions affirm that food is an element in spiritual celebration and experience. Whenever we eat, we consciously affirm that eating is a sacred spiritual practice which celebrates the delicate interplay of plants, animals and people, land, air, and water that makes this possible and we commit ourselves again to maintaining this creation. All our traditions affirm that specific times and practices of great religious significance, such as Passover, the Mass, and Eid al-Adha, include food as a central element. Some of our traditions affirm that for religious reasons, certain foods may be forbidden to eat and others encouraged, either all the time or at specific times.

Dimension 8. Reflection on our Actions and Impact

The rhythm of Action and Reflection, renewed Action and renewed Reflection, is encouraged in our traditions in such forms as Sabbaths, Ramadan, and Lent, as well as other holidays when we refrain from our daily work and reflect on our roles in the web of life. Meaningful observance of these occasions can be expanded to include reflection on and assessment of the impact of human activity on the integrity of the web of life. In different ways, our traditions may choose to encourage reviews, similar to "environmental impact assessments," when considering whether to endorse new approaches to providing food. Some version of what is called the "precautionary principle," analogous to the medical code's, "First do no harm," could be taken into account, while still encouraging the development of new technologies and social arrangements.

Coda: New Era of Religious Life?

This Sacred Foods enterprise itself – because it draws strength from both interfaith, and inter-secular/faith interactions -- signals something of a new era in religious life. At that level and in many other arenas, Modernity is having a major impact on the self-understanding of the religious traditions. Indeed, Modernity is affecting both technology and social structures in ways that may require us to rethink some of the teachings of the past. Major changes in previous religious wisdoms have often accompanied major social and technological upheavals. That occurred when the impact of Roman/Hellenistic civilization opened hearts and minds to the new revelations of Rabbinic Judaism and Christianity about two thousand years ago, and when social change in Arabia opened hearts and minds to the new revelations of Islam 1400 years ago. After the Sacred Foods project reaches agreement and establishes leadership in areas that the Eight Dimensions easily point us toward (like support for sustainably grown food, grown, packaged and distributed with fair labor standards), we might choose to tackle some larger and more complicated questions. For example, one of the major ways in which Modernity challenges and is challenged by the traditional outlooks of our communities is that the traditions lean toward providing food mostly through decentralized, local, and neighborly means. Modernity often looks toward global/ corporate ways of providing food. We face the question of whether to treat the focus on local means as a crucial and eternally wise teaching, or to treat it as historically conditioned, while absorbing global / corporate arrangements so long as they meet other traditional values. On these and perhaps on other questions, we will need to keep seeking to distinguish eternal wisdom from temporally conditioned history, as we draw on the religious and spiritual teachings of the past.

THE KOSHER PATHWAY: FOOD AS GOD-CONNECTION IN THE LIFE OF THE JEWISH PEOPLE

By Rabbi Arthur Waskow

The People Israel began its relationship with the sacredness of food as an indigenous community in its own land, by offering local food in sacred shrines as a primary way of connecting to God.

The Hebrew word usually translated as "sacrifice" or "offering" is *korban*, which literally means, "what is brought near." A word from the same root means "innards," and the *korban* was what brought God near to the most inward part of the human body.

The foods that brought God as near as physically/spiritually possible included beef and mutton as well as barley, wheat, leavened and unleavened bread, pancakes, olive oil, various fruits, wine, and water.

Varied configurations of these *korbanot* or "nearings" were celebrated at sunrise and sunset, the new moon, every seventh day as a day of rest, and sacred festivals connected to the spring and autumn harvests. These "nearings" were also used to restore personal equanimity by expiating guilt, celebrating joy, and addressing other moments of spiritual disturbance.

Sometimes these foods were "turned into smoke upon the altar." In this way, as smoke that joined with air, they also joined with the Breath of Life, the Interbreathing of all life that may have been evoked by the divine name "YHWH." (Try pronouncing these four letters with no vowels. Most people find what emerges is the rush of a breath or of the wind. In Hebrew, the word *ruach* means "breath," "wind," and "spirit" -- just as *pneuma* does in Greek, *spiritus* in Latin.)

More often, however, these foods were given to the Priests, their assistants--the Levites, and to the poor, landless, orphans and "resident sojourners" to eat. Since Priests and Levites had no land of their own to cultivate, they were amongst the categories of people that would have nothing to eat without the food from these "nearings" and from the gleanings the poor were entitled to gather from the fields of every landholder.

In addition to the practice of sacrifice that defined food as the sacred channel for bringing us near to God, some specific foods were defined as sacred and some as forbidden. Endless debates have been engendered over the specifics of this regimen -- why the meat of pigs, camels, crabs, and hawks was prohibited while that of sheep, goats, cows, doves, chickens, and tuna was permitted. To some extent, the forbidden animals were predators, carnivores, and omnivores, while those permitted were more likely to be herbivores and/or domesticated animals. There was a tendency toward what might be called "vicarious vegetarianism" -- eating mostly creatures whose own diet was made up of plants. There is in fact

evidence in some of the sacred texts of a wistful memory of a time, past or future, when human beings might eat only plants.

Some have also argued that the permitted foods came from creatures strongly connected with living on the land, or in the sea, or in the air – as against amphibians or insects that might cross these boundaries. It is argued that since the creation legends of the Israelites distinguished and emphasized these three domains, eating from these distinctive domains was a way for human beings to affirm or even join in the process of Creation.

Whatever one thinks of such efforts to explain the content of the code of permissible foods, it is clear that the regimen itself put great emphasis on knowing that choices of food were sacred decisions.

As part of this process of connection with God through food, the land as well as the people were entitled and obligated to pause from work every seventh day, every seventh year, and an extra year after the seventh cycle of seven years. In those years, the community ate from what had been stored and from free-will gathering of food that grew on its own, without sowing or harvesting.

All this affirmed and gave physical reality to the collective Israelite assertion that no human being, not even the human community as a whole, owned the land: Only God, YHWH, the Interbreathing of all life, owned the earth.

This system of sacred foods reached its apogee in the great spring festival of Pesach, or Passover. It seems to have sprung from a festival of shepherds, celebrating the birth of new lambs, and a festival of farmers, celebrating the sprouting of barley. As tokens of these celebrations (later redefined to fit into celebration of the spring-like uprising of the people against slavery and Pharaoh), the eating of leavened bread was prohibited, the eating of unleavened bread was required, and the *korban* of roasted lambs was also required.

Starting over, rebirth, was the focus: Bread must be the simplest food a farmer could make: grain and water and heat, without yeast or flavoring. Meat must be the simplest a herdsman could make: new lamb roasted on a fire, not even water would be used to boil it. No raw meat and no raw vegetables were included, for human beings are technological animals. These were the foods from the dawn of fire and farming.

This process was interrupted for about seventy years by the destruction of the First Temple in Jerusalem by the Babylonian Empire. But even before then, the channels of God's wisdom who became canonized as the Prophets began to speak out for other ways of connecting with God.

Some of the Prophets excoriated the assumption that offerings of food could bring God near if the society did not insist on justice, on sharing the abundance

of food from the land, on sacred rest for workers and owners alike from the toil of producing. Others began to speak of offering words – what came out of the mouth as well as what went into it—as a way of connecting with God.

But it took the triumph of Roman/Hellenistic civilization in economics, politics, science, philosophy, and weaponry to shatter the whole system of food-and-body Judaism enshrined in the Hebrew Bible. As the economy of the Mediterranean basin was transformed, more and more Jews lived far too far from the Jerusalem Temple to bring their food there as "nearings" for God. The foods they ate were no longer from a small strip of land along the eastern Mediterranean, but from such great bread-baskets as Egypt and from their own locales. Fewer and fewer Jews had political control over the land policy of the societies where they lived, and therefore could not celebrate sabbatical years or other physical ways of reaffirming God's ownership of the earth.

Moreover, the use of words of prayer and study as a way of making Divine connection became more and more attractive as Jews watched and learned from Hellenistic philosophers.

This process of divorce from the "nearing" of food as the most sacred practice was made full and final by the Roman Empire's destruction of the Second Temple in 70 CE, and the decimation of the Jewish population of the Land of Israel after the Roman repression of the Bar Kochba Revolt, in 135 CE.

What we now call Rabbinic Judaism emerged from this crisis. It preserved the celebration of food in a much lesser way and elevated the use of words to a much greater one.

The mouth remained the locus of God-connection. But the emergence of the notion of *Torah sheh baal peh* – literally, "Torah through the power of the mouth," or "the oral Torah," was Torah of words, not food. This "Oral Torah" was said to emerge alongside with and intertwined with the Written Torah, from the word-study of skilled interpreters over the centuries from Sinai on and into the future forever and in every land.

But food was not forgotten. The rabbis taught that with the Holy Altar gone, the dinner table in every Jewish home was now an altar. While the specific rituals of the Altar were mostly not transferred to every kitchen, the elaborateness of the sacred "nearings" was transformed into elaborate rules that went far beyond the biblical limits on what to eat.

A few mysterious biblical lines about "not boiling a kid in the milk of its mother" were interpreted into a vast network of rules for how to separate milk and all its products and utensils from those of meat. Rules for the ritual slaughter of animals permissible for meat likewise became extraordinarily elaborate.

Alongside the legal requirements of what to eat and not eat for Passover grew up strong customs of what to eat to mark each festival: oil-fried pancakes and doughnuts to honor the consecration of oil at Hanukkah; fruits and nuts and wine in carefully ordered series for Tu B'Shvat; rebirth-day of the trees; apples dipped in honey for the sweet new round cycle of the year for Rosh Hashanah; and so on.

In our own generation, the impact of modernity on rabbinic Judaism has in some ways replicated, even gone beyond, the impact of the Roman/Hellenistic civilization of biblical Israel. In the arena of food as in others, this has shattered much of the old system and is beginning to sow seeds of new possibility.

For example, the smallest proportion of the Jewish people in rabbinic history now adheres to the official rules of kosher food in its own eating. Yet out of the economic and cultural clout of even a minority of Jews has grown a pantry of kosher-certified commercial foods eaten by millions of non-Jews -- in numbers that would have been an utter astonishment to Jews of the last three thousand years.

And the world-wide ecological crisis created by the actions of the human race in the last few generations of modernity has begun to raise concerns among Jews as well as other communities, for how to redefine what food is proper and sacred to grow and to eat. Questions about the use of pesticides and of genomic engineering; of the burning of fossil fuels to transport foods across the planet, meanwhile disturbing the whole climatic context in which the foods are grown; the misuse of topsoil and the use of long-term poisonous fertilizers; the effects of massive livestock breeding on production of a potent global-scorching gas, methane -- all these have raised profound new questions.

These questions are global in scale and are not for Jews alone. And so there has arisen another radical departure from the conventions of previous Jewish life: Consultations in which Jews join with others to refine and redefine these questions.

The new technologies of modern life have thrust upon the Jewish community still another unexpected question: Should the category "kosher" be reserved for food alone, for what we literally put into our mouths and gullets? -- Or would it make sense in our generation to apply the basic concept to other products of the earth, other forms of "eating" -- consuming? If the whole notion of "kosher" food emerged when most human beings were farmers and herdsfolk, eating food, should there be a new kind of "kosher" for a world in which human beings also "eat"/consume coal, oil, uranium? Should we attempt to imagine an "eco-kosher" code for consuming not only food but also all that an abundant and partially depleted earth produces?

Through the peculiar history and theology in which the Jews preserve both a sense of indigenous earth-connected peoplehood and a sense of worldwide

presence and significance, can the Jewish attention to food as a crucial means of connection with God play an unusually useful role in the future of the human race and planet earth?

Rabbi Arthur Waskow is director of The Shalom Center. He is the author of *Down-to-Earth Judaism: Food, Money, Sex, & the Rest of Life* (Morrow, 1995) and many other books and articles on Jewish thought and practice.

RESOURCES

CURRICULUM RESOURCES

Food and Faith: Justice, Joy, and Daily Bread, a resource available from Earth Ministry at http://www.earthministry.org/food_faith.htm

Just Eating? Practicing Our Faith at the Table

This seven-session curriculum for congregational discussion groups, written by Jennifer Halteman, explores the links between the way we eat and the way we live. Skillfully weaving scripture, prayer, and stories from our local and global community, the curriculum explores four key aspects of our relationship with food: the health of our bodies; the challenge of hunger; the health of the earth that provides our food; and the ways we use food to extend hospitality and enrich relationships.

www.pcusa.org/hunger/food

Rethinking School Lunch (RSL)

The RSL program uses a systems approach to address the crisis in childhood obesity, provide nutrition education, and teach ecological knowledge.

www.ecoliteracy.org/programs/rsl.html

Youth Based Curriculum and Programs developed by the Food Project

Includes French “Fries and the Food System: A Year Round Curriculum Connecting Youth with Farming and Food” and a manual series on the principles, structures, and philosophies vital to the success of any youth-based program.

www.thefoodproject.org/buy/internal1.asp?ID=144

Teaching Organic Farming & Gardening: Resources for Instructors

Published in 2003 by the UC Santa Cruz Center for Agroecology and Sustainable Food Systems, this 600-page manual covers practical aspects of organic farming and gardening, applied soil science, and social and environmental issues in agriculture. Units contain lecture outlines for instructors and detailed lecture outlines for students, field and laboratory demonstrations, assessment questions, and annotated resource lists.

<http://zzyx.ucsc.edu/casfs/education/instruction/tofg/index.html>

Teaching Direct Marketing and Small Farm Viability: Resources for Instructors

Published in 2005, these resources are organized into six units, three focusing on marketing and three covering other topics related to making a small farm economically viable. Included are lessons and resources for running a community supported agriculture (CSA) project, selling at farmers’ markets, forming collaborative marketing groups and grower cooperatives, and selling to restaurants. Also covered are strategies to improve small farm planning, including enterprise visioning and market assessment; creating a business plan, including marketing and crop plans; and managing cash flow.

<http://zzyx.ucsc.edu/casfs/education/instruction/tdm/index.html>

Just Eating? Practicing Our Faith At the Table: Readings for Reflection and Action, a curriculum developed by Advocate Health Care, Church World Service and the Presbyterian Hunger Program and available at <http://www.pcusa.org/hunger/features/justeating.htm>

Resources on Industrial Agriculture and Humane Sustainable Food Systems

The following online and published resources may be helpful for designing food related curricula and for establishing sustainable food practices within educational institutions and religious organization.

WEBSITES

International:

- Compassion in World Farming (www.ciwf.org.uk/index.shtml)
- Environmental Health Perspective (www.ehponline.org/topic/agriculture.html)
- Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations (www.fao.org/)
- Food First: Institute for Food and Development Policy (www.foodfirst.org/)
- Future Harvest (www.futureharvest.org/)
- International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) (www.ifpri.org)
- International Fund for Agricultural Development (www.ifad.org/)
- World Health Organization (www.who.int/en/)
- World Resources Institute (www.wri.org/)
- World Society for the Protection of Animals (www.wspa-international.org/)
- Worldwatch Institute (www.worldwatch.org)

US Focused:

- Alternative Farming Systems Information Center (<http://afsic.nal.usda.gov>)
- Center for Food Safety (www.centerforfoodsafety.org/)
- Community Alliance with Family Farmers (www.caff.org/)
- Community Food Security Coalition (www.foodsecurity.org/)
- Ecological Farming Association (www.eco-farm.org/)
- Factory Farming (www.factoryfarming.org)
- Food Security Learning Center (www.worldhungeryear.org/fslc/)
- The Humane Society of the United States (www.hsus.org/farm/)
- Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy (www.iatp.org/)
- Keep Antibiotics Working Campaign (www.keepantibioticsworking.com)
- National Campaign for Sustainable Agriculture (www.sustainableagriculture.net/)
- National Sustainable Agriculture Information Service (<http://attra.ncat.org/>)
- The New Farm (www.newfarm.org)
- Organic Consumers Association (www.organicconsumers.org/)
- Pesticide Action Network of North America (www.panna.org/)

- Public Citizen (www.citizen.org/cmep/foodsafety/)
- Sierra Club (www.sierraclub.org)
- Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (www.sare.org)
- Sustainable Table (www.sustainabletable.org)
- Union of Concerned Scientists (www.ucsusa.org/food_and_environment/)
- U.S. Department of Agriculture (www.usda.gov)

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FAITH AND FOOD PARTNERSHIPS, PROGRAMS, AND CAMPAIGNS

Campaign for Fair Food

The Campaign for Fair Food is an ongoing effort of the Presbyterian Church (USA), in partnership with farmworkers from the Coalition of Immokalee Workers (CIW), to establish purchasing practices within the retail food industry that advance fair wages and other human rights of tomato pickers who labor at the base of corporate supply chains.

www.pcusa.org/fairfood

Faith in Place: Stronger Congregations for a Sustainable World

Faith in Place is a non-profit organization that gives religious people the tools to become good stewards of the earth. They partner with religious congregations to promote clean energy and sustainable farming.

www.faithinplace.org

Faithful Harvest Campaign

An Eco-Justice program of the National Council of Churches of Christ, Faithful Harvest is a grass roots movement to transform the U.S. food system, via policy, organizing, mission, advocacy, and worship, into a food system that rights the injustices of current practices.

www.nccecojustice.org

Interfaith Food and Farms Partnership

A project of Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon and Interfaith Network for Earth Concerns, the Interfaith Food & Farms Partnership strives to empower faith communities, farmers and neighborhoods to build rural-urban alliances and create innovative partnerships for just and sustainable food systems.

www.emoregon.org

The National Catholic Rural Life Conference (NCRLC)

NCRLC is a membership organization with a strong focus on agriculture and food issues. Initiatives include: Agribusiness Accountability Initiative, an open forum on the impact of agribusiness conglomerates on farmers and ranchers, rural landscapes and food security; Global Partners in Rural Life Development, a global network of organizations and training centers devoted to sustainable agriculture, livelihoods, and the environment; and Sustainable Communities on the Land, which provides resources for rural communities seeking sustainability and a database of religious communities on the land. www.ncrlc.com

Sacred Foods Project

The Sacred Foods Project is an interfaith effort to promote greater understanding about how to grow, process and market food according to religions teachings and ethics. www.aleph.org/sacredfoods/htm

HIGHER EDUCATION PROGRAMS AND INITIATIVES

Portland State University – making food services humane and sustainable through a new contract with food service giant, Sodexo. For more information on PSU's food contract, see www.pdx.edu/sustainability/cs_downloads.html (contract documents) and www.psudining.com/community.html (Sodexo programs at PSU).

University of California Santa Cruz – strategic partnerships for advancing education, research, and institutional change toward creating sustainable food systems. See information on campus based initiatives and statewide developments at: <http://socialsciences.ucsc.edu/casfs/farm2college/index.html>

University of New Hampshire Food & Society Initiative – actively engaging the University community in local and sustainable agriculture and nutrition projects, such as a New Hampshire farm to school program, an organic dairy farm, and a commitment to cage-free eggs.
www.sustainableunh.unh.edu/fas/

Community Food Security Coalition Farm to College Programs – a main resource and spring board for existing farm to college programs nationwide.
www.farmtocollege.org/

CERTIFICATION INFORMATION

- Humane – www.certifiedhumane.com
- Organic – www.ams.usda.gov/nop/indexIE.htm; www.ccof.org
- Fair Trade – www.transfairusa.org; www.fairtrade.net
- Local Sourcing – www.foodroutes.org
- Other/Third Party Certification
 - Food Alliance – www.foodalliance.org