**Draft – October 7, 2020 (original September 29, 2020)**

**Revelation in a Time of *Survival*: Spirituality and Sustainability. A Zoom Series from Spiritual Leaders of the Greater Boston Area on Climate Change and the** **Pandemic.**

### Session Five: "Judaism and Tikkun olam”

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**Roger Gottlieb:** I am a professor philosophy. I've done a good deal of writing about religion and the environment and morality in the environment spirituality in the environment. The environment and the environment as well as the place of religion, religion and democracy and a number of other things. What I'm going to do this evening is talk a little bit about Judaism and the environmental crisis.

I'm not a rabbi. I have not learned fewer scholar, but I have thought about the connection of virtually every religion, including my own. To what I consider to be the overriding concern the overriding threat the overriding challenge in a way the overriding opportunity alone rage compared to the environmental crisis. Everything else is shrunken to not insignificant, but much less importance.

Now notice I'm not saying global warming because while Global Warming or Global climate change or the climate crisis is obviously central to experience of humanity presence on it's not the only thing. When the snow on top of Mount Everest is so polluted, that if you boil it down to drink it would be toxic. When the blood streams of newborn infants contain already 100 toxic chemicals. When the blood streams of giant squids three miles below the surface of the ocean contain furniture chemicals in them, paint, varnish chemicals as owning from furniture you know that it's yes it's the climate, but it's all these other things as well. It's the die off of the bats and the die off of the insects. It's everything that we're touching dying.

Some years ago, many years ago. In fact, I was at a conference. It was in college for environmentalist, it was just so invitation only. That's a very famous scientist there and they couldn't find a famous philosopher, so they got me. And there was a guy who was very internationally known for his work on oceans. It was just the top guys have on oceans in the world. And he looked at us and he said everything I've studied to get my big deal reputation and he had a very big reputation. He said, Everything I've studied it's dying or dead.

So that's what brings us together brings the reality of the environmental crisis now. We just going to bring up some notes. So you can see where I'm going here. Yeah, okay.

Okay. neurotics boat is where we live on Earth was a mathematician who had an interesting idea. He said, consider a boat out on the ocean and the boat has problems. It has a leak, the radio is out, that there's a tear in the sale. You're so far out to sea that you can't go back. If you're going to repair the boat. If you're going to survive. You have to repair it while you're sailing on it.

What is neurotics both it's our collective human culture. The collective human culture got us into this difficulty. The collective human culture has to be transformed. Yet we can't simply abandon that we can't bring the boat on the shore hold up the dry dock, we have to use what we have, we have to rediscover the sources that will help. We have to criticize what's lacking or mistaken in the tradition.

And we have to develop new forms, all three things at once. I believe that there are some significant Jewish resources for the environmental crisis. I also think it's clear in my mind. That Judaism, like all the other religions of the world has certain real deficiencies. After all, if you look at the history of environmental problem religions, we're certainly not the first people to get the point. First people to get the point where free last free sort of freelance spiritual types like Thoreau and John Muir and some of the Romantic poets and the 19th century. Then you have the sort of anti communist Marxist of the Frankfurt School 1920s and 30s for climber adore know and mark. Martin Heidegger, a German philosopher who later turned to a really horrible Nazi but he understood something about modern technology.

It wasn't until the 70s that we'd be getting a glimmer of this so religions were late to the dance. So, religions have had to transform themselves and they have. And I've written and edited a whole bunch of books about how that's taking place, but we're still is a question which religion takes the environmental crisis as seriously as they take who has sex with who and which one takes it as seriously as maintaining their tax free status or controls.

On a woman's body in terms of abortion bill which one and it's really questionable if any of them do. Some years ago is Mar Schorsch who was the chancellor of the rabbinical seminary up Conservative Judaism said we are facing the greatest threat humanity has ever faced and Jews are hung up on worrying about paganism. Now paganism. It's a traditional concern in the Torah, you shouldn't worship the earth, you should cut down the trees when you go into the Promised Land. Cut down a lot of people's sacred gross there, but really is. That's what it issue. So I speak out of Judaism resources. With acknowledgement that Judaism, like every other religion every and every other secular tradition has had to transform itself and to confront its own limitations and this time of year Jews talk about *tshuva* repentance, which sort of literally means that kind of turning. Religions have had to turn thing though the heavens, they have been turning, but it's a slow process. And it's underway. It has not been completed.

Okay, so I'm going to talk about two dimensions of Judaism, because I consider Judaism as certainly a theology and the religious practices which are entailed by the theology, but also a certain kind of historical experience Jews are a people as well as a collection of people who believe something. It's a sort of cliche of social identity, the person who's Jewish and doesn't leave any Jewish teaching, but he's still Jewish very Jewish. Right. Is it kind of cliche, because we are a people as well as a theological community and ethnic group and national group and ethical something along those lines. And we have had a certain kinds of historical experience culminating and crystallized in the Holocaust, which also gives us some understanding there the Jewish resource can say, not just in a teaching, which is considerable. But also in historical experience.

Finally, as an introduction. Every religion has some very good things to say about our relation to nature. Every religion, Christianity, Judaism thousand towers and Buddhism, but it's not just what they said because there is no real religion. There's no real Judaism is a real Christianity. It's not like you know the Sermon on the Mount is more real than St. Paul. The question is, in any given historical period. What part of the tradition is the leading lights is the dominant interpretation is the major framework.

And for know Western religion as our relationship to nature been the leading light. So what the first thing we have to do is recover. What do we have. That's a value because whatever you can say about the quotations. I'm about to share with you. You can't say that not an essential part of that tradition, what you can say that they've been marginalized low light it. You got highlights and lowlights with these things have been low lighted. So, here are five things probably could be others I can be organized different ways in which Jewish tradition tells us.

Here is how we should guide your relationship with nature and **the first one is prudence**. Don't be stupid. Don't be wasteful, there's one particular command. I didn't put the quotation. I forgot to put it in, but Balta sheet. Do not waste. Now this doesn't say anything about the value of nature, anything else. It's just don't waste something. So if we go down a little bit. When you lay siege to a city fighting to capture it, do not destroy its trees by putting an axe to them. That I cut them down all the trees of the few people that you should besieged them. However, you may cut down trees that are not fruit trees. So this is just pure prudence.

What conservative people call wise use it has no value in itself, but don't, don't be a schmuck, they'll be stupid if you come across a bird's nest beside the road. Tree on a ground and the mother is sitting on the younger the eggs do not take the mother with the young. You may take the young, but be sure to let the mother go said it may go well with you and you may have a long life. So do not waste. Do not cut down trees that will give you fruit.

Don't destroy the mother with the eggs if this was all that the Torah taught us about our relationship, the environment and we took it seriously. That would be a great deal. Now you because we would cut because we have been constantly destroying the fruit trees. Killing the mother egg with the eighth.

We've been constantly wasting the degree of waste. The average American Waste 170 pounds of food, a year 170 pounds. And that's not just food that could go to somebody who's hungry. That's a huge amount of greenhouse gases global warming and pesticide for going to be soil. Also, what a waste comparable things with clothes the clothes that are thrown away cotton is one of those polluting agricultural products there is, I don't know. I was a little bitty facts. It's why nobody invites me to cocktail parties. I'm just a bummer, with all the stuff so proofs.

**Second thing we have from traditional Jewish teaching is something about the moral standing of nature.** The central question what's right and what's wrong said central question of morality is what is even a moral right is the color of my shirt, a moral question. Another setting the kind of shirt I wear whether or not I cover my head. Certainly, if you're a woman, the kind of clothes. Where's often bound up in some moral concern. So his relationship to animals to trees to the sky to the roof. Is that a moral question is the way we treat it something that can be categorized as morally right.

And morally wrong or is morally neutral and it's clear from the Torah that at least sometimes it's a moral questions. So we go down to If you come across your enemies offs or donkey wandering off. Be sure to take it back to him. If you see the donkey of someone who hates you, your enemy not your pal, but your enemy had fallen down under its load. Do not leave it there. Be sure to help him with it. A sabbatical year for six years, you're to plow your fields and harvest your crops during the seventh year let the land line plowed unused. Then the poor among your people may get food from it. The poor right, take care of the widow. The stranger and the orphan that standard biblical teaching. But there's something else added in here and the wild animals may eat what they leave, save the food, the extra food that falls in the vineyard don't collect it. Don't even collect all of it, give it to the poor human beings. Leave it also for the wild animals. Do not muzzle the ox.

While that is treading out the grain, I have this image. I don't know if it's correct or not ox connected to a huge post which is connected to a huge round will and it's grinding the grain and there's all this great around but you put a muzzle on a canny know take the muzzle law. And let agree, when Chavez comes Sabbath calm six days your work on the seventh, you do not work, not just, you know, work your ox and your donkey may rest and the slave and the alien maybe refresh. So there's a suggestion here that we have some kind of moral obligation to the non human that even if it walks on four legs or quacks like a duck. That it has some kind of moral standing. Is it the same moral standing as human beings. No, but it has some real estate. And out of that we can ask ourselves, well, what is allowed and what isn't the law. You can't muzzle the ox. You can't make the animals work seven days. Can you eat them.

Read Abraham, Isaac, cook who was the chief rabbi pre-state Israel was a vegetarian. And he knew that the people you know that the Ashkenazi Jews, the European origin Jews were not going to do that very heavy meat center die. Right, you don't have chicken soup on Friday night, there's something wrong. So he knew it, but he said look, take a look at the laws, the kosher laws, you can boil a kid mitts mother's milk. You can't eat shellfish candy animals a certain kind of fluff.

Said, that's a preparation. The preparation to get us to begin to realize that there are moral constraints on what we eat like animals. And eventually he says, as you as the Jews progress it moved towards vegetarianism. So there's a sense that there are limits on what we can do. It's not unlimited the cornerstone of modern science post 17th century on is that nature exists simply to be dominated the Torah says no, there are limits.

**Okay. A third thing I'm going to talk about is ontological connection**. That's a fancy philosophical way of saying or human beings and nature, the same kind of thing. or is there some fundamental unbridgeable gulf between what I am. And what the tree outside my window is and what my dog is and what the squirrels are or those damn wild turkeys that stroll down the street, have no fear of anything. They really kind of cool. Are we the same kind of thing. No, it's you know, it's a sort of familiar question philosophy of the environment. Well, our human being natural and not and clearly, in some ways, we're like everything else.

We're like exactly like everything else that subatomic particles in my body or the same as the subatomic particles in the tree and in the squirrels in the tree and in the clouds in the sky waltzing subatomic particles. I like every other animal like a grey the plants like the fish am a product of evolution. So, in that sense, I am I have some distinct features. But of course, so does the sun have some distinct features and the shark has some distinct features. So question that is in what respect to be the same. And what respects will be different. So here's another tiny bit of the biblical answer.

Where do you come from, well, everybody knows, there are two different creation stories in Genesis. Here's the second one, the Lord God formed man from the dust of the cry of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life and the man became a living being. Right. High enough fish living breath. Okay, which is the Hebrew phrase that often is used to describe animals in the Torah, usually that translated in a different way to distinguish between animals and human being does not know. Okay. Keep in mind. Who was the first man Adam. We all know that Adam is very close to this word I de ma, which means Earth. So we might translate the name Adam as earthling when life is over, go back into the dust or we some fundamentally different kind of thing than the dust. Well, not according to this particular writing a victorious and familiar choke now that the Torah was written by at least three or four different authors over three to five or 600 years but this is one theme in the Torah, this kind of thing.

Also notice a God after the Torah after God killed everything with the flood almost everything and no safe. God had got a temper tantrum. He's a Guy. She was sort of disappointed in what she created the notion that in the Bible. God is all powerful, all wise is simply force. Quite clear if you read Genesis. God is frequently disappointed, which means that God had expectations unfulfilled, which means the God did not know everything. So, all knowing God not in the Bible.

There isn't that much later sort of notion**, but with whom does God make a covenant contract which is central theme of the tour**. That's what distinguishes the Jewish people is that supposedly we have a covenant to contract with God.

I now establish my covenant with you and your descendants, and every living creature that was with you. The birds a livestock the wild animals every living creature on Earth is establish my covenant. God doesn't just agree with us. God is agreeing with all of life. Never again will all life be cut off by the waters of the flood. If we're in the same group with whom God is making an agreement as the dolphins and the crows and the cockroaches. Right and the ants and the bumblebees the stuff that's not so pretty. I mean, are these charismatic megafauna like pandas that everybody loves. Very few people love cockroaches, but they're living beings to Then clearly the ontological separation between human beings and the rest of life is not absolute, it's not totally clear and in some cases like in this passage right here in Genesis nine, it doesn't exist. There is no ontological separation there is rather a connection all of like the holiness. The unit of measure is all of life now footnote to repeat is this everything in the Torah. No. Other contrary things in the Torah. Absolutely. Are the contrary things in the tumbler later Jewish tradition. Yes, but there's also this if you go 1000 years later in Jewish tradition down to where is my pal Maimonides. He's generally considered the most important single post biblical or at least post how ludic Jewish philosopher, say from the your 700 to be your. Maimonides is sort of the top of the top of the tree there. It should not

Be believe that all beings exist for the sake of the existence of humanity. On the contrary, all other beings have been intended for their own sakes, and not for the sake of some thing else

You find it almost the exact same kind of notion in the correct it's not just for us right all the other beings all the other beings as another quote here which says, Of all the things that God created God did not create anything that's useless. Everything has value, everything has used. Everything has its own destiny. 18th century philosophy Western philosophy was very clear that only human beings were rational only human beings could set their own goals and there are moral beliefs therefore only human beings were a value. Yeah. Maimonides is disagree. Everything has its value. Know the tree can have a political argument, but I can't stand up like a tree. I can't make a home for birds. Right. I can't take carbon dioxide. out of the atmosphere. I can't support the life of other trees which trees. Do they have a kind of communal connection through the root system fungus. I can't do any of that. So each of us has our gifts, our ways of contributing to the totality of life on Earth.

Okay, so this is an interesting one. We are used to thinking of nature as beautiful as useful as inspiring, perhaps, of having a moral standing of its own, but there's a little bit of suggestion in some biblical texts that nature itself has its own spiritual subjectivity. Now, what now. Could that mean we think of spirituality as belief, we think of spirituality as tradition we think of spirituality as ritual or spiritual practice prayer, meditation, yoga, Tai Chi. You know, the, the prayers that Muslims say five times a day, the Yoga sutras of potentially thinking, what the hell could things that are not human. However, if you look at their ego psalm 150 the last song.

Let everything that breathes. Praise God.

Now, scratch your head. What is a sama storekeeper can my dog. Praise God. Can the blue jays outside my window. Praise God. And the stinking cockroaches prayed. Scott, they all brief imagery and sense breathes curl on the show my everything all breath. To hello yeah hello and worked with connected to the root of the word. Hallelujah. Hallelujah. Praise Yahweh God hallelujah just praise God.

I love the moon interpretation of it. Quite clearly, the tree. And the dolphin can articulate in a language, a sentence that praises. But what can we do as human beings only week and understand this sentence, what we can do is train ourselves train ourselves to see the tree and the dolphin and yes, even the cockroach as something which celebrates life. And if we believe in God celebrates God separates the creative forces in the universe celebrates the process of evolution, which brought all this to existence celebrates the universe, which allowed all of us to sit here look at a computer brief brussels sprouts for dinner, you know, have sex and drink wine and listen to Bach and over whatever gives us joy.

Hello, that everything that breeds. Praise God.

**Finally, nature's ego spiritual life**. I don't imagine I have to, you know, sell this one very hard. We learn from nature to develop ourselves spiritually. I am suggesting is one juice suggestion here because ego nature functions without an ego. The tree will stand there, it will give you a shade will give you beautiful in a home for squirrels and birds and all that kind of thing. But it won't do is feel bad because it's not the tallest tree. It won't be anxious about climate change, it won't get mad at the guy coming with the chainsaw to cut it down it will just give everything it can to the process of life until it dies.

When we're in the context of nature. We don't just see physical beauty. We certainly see that but we also get a sense of all this wonder without an ego. So, almost done. Don't worry about it. This won't take long. Finished up without too much time. The historical experience of the Jews is wide and varied 20 503,000 years of persecution of occupying a land of losing the land occupying again losing again getting it back fighting wars. I just want to talk in particular about the Holocaust. What do we learn from the Holocaust. We learned a great deal. But we learn at least relevant to my journey. Two things. One, we learned about technology that most sophisticated technology can combine with evil right the Nazis did not kill Jews with knives. They killed some of them. They didn't just kill them by starving them, they did that. But they took a very sophisticated chemicals icon be derived from the work of Fritz Haber. Somebody who helped develop poison gas and World War One, somebody who was born a Jew and converted to Christianity. Someone who developed chemical fertilizer. Probably the most important scientists of the 20th century, you probably might never heard his name, but he's very important so icon be was a pest was a pesticide and Jess, I cannot be was adapted to the concentration camps, because the Nazi who is looking for a place to house a concentration camp and master saw an old Polish guy spraying something at the base of the sort of old wooden buildings. If it's abandoned Polish army camp. And he said, What are you doing is I'm spraying it to keep the bugs out of the building, keeping from eating the building the guy that. Oh, the Jews need to be exterminated. The Jews like a virus that user infection will kill them was like Landy.

What we have in the world today is the most spectacularly sophisticated technology that so far bond can imagine, and it can still combined with social madness, as it has the internet filled with madness. You know what I mean. But lack of attention to transforming our energy system and enormous characteristic of madness. The social surveillance techniques fascist madness.

And that leads to this: There's nobody home to protect us Jews of Germany for, oh well, somebody will stop this madman, and nobody did. People of the world, I've thought good hearted people. I thought, oh, well, somebody will take care of it. Sierra Club EPA, the United Nations, somebody will make it stop.

Well, we haven't made it stop the level of CO2 continues to rise the pesticides, the pollutants can continue to Ross, the smoke in California has affected the air quality in Boston. It continues. It has not stopped. If you're a Jew who takes the Holocaust. Seriously, you know, there's no guarantee they'll stop. Ths does not leave us with a great deal of hope.

It may, if we so choose can leave us with courage, because if you examine the history of Jewish resistance to the Holocaust, you will see people resistant physically in every concentration camp in every ghetto people joining the Partisans in the forest, people who were sure they would die and almost all of them did. But people who said I will resist. I will fight back.

I will do what I can. Now out of courage, I will try to find even though hope is something that I've lost. I wish I could give you a more cheerful image. After studying this for the last 30 years I cannot but I can give you the image of Jews who fought back. That was our historical of the experience of the Holocaust is not just that we died. It's also that resistance that we resisted may that be the historical experience of humanity that. Thank you.

**Rabbi Katy Allen**: Thank you. Well, Roger. That was wonderful. That was powerful really appreciate that. So I'm going to speak from a very different perspective. So I'm just going to start by sharing the today. I was on a Zoom meeting with about 15 or 20 of my colleagues and we were just kind of talking about our experience with the high holidays and I mean, I've been leading services outdoors for like almost 15 years 1015 years. And so I had figured out a way that we were going to continue to do that, although we did do some assuming but everybody talked about these services that they had and talked about the good things they talked about the things that were difficult, but they also talked about the good things.

That came about because of the fact that the services were on zoom as opposed to the traditional way of being in the inside. In the synagogue and I found that very interesting and it was like and you know you make reference to the opportunities. It's like the opportunities are always there we don't always take them until unless we have to and so this year for high holidays and her, you know, for all of us in all of our religious traditions, when our particularly, you know, every week, but also when our particularly important holidays comes in everybody comes out of the woodwork.

You know, these are the times that we really have to stretch ourselves and figure out ways to make this work for people and you know and we're doing it so this is a kind of an example of when push comes to shove, of how we really can make things happen and we can do things that I think there's some power now.

So actually what I was thinking about mentioning was is actually ties really much very much into what Roger said at the end which is a little piece by the ball Shana, Tova, was a Hasidic master in the 18th century, and he you know he knew tumultuous time senior difficult times. It wasn't he wasn't strangers in that for sure. He talked about the idea that we can encounter these times was sacred intention by engaging in spirit through spiritual processes, the first of which is yielding to reality and then and then you know you then once you revealed to the reality, then you can examine your choices you can figure out what your choices are and then you can kind of sweeten your reality with either what you do or how you make things happen, how you, how you can tell you this, and I feel like this idea of yielding to the reality, this idea of acknowledging finding the courage to face the reality. I mean, that's even just facing it is hard and then after that, then you decide what you're going to do that might also be challenging. But I think, for I think for people to really confront this reality and acknowledged and be able to really absorb it, and I frankly I tend to say that I think we're all in denial, to some extent, because, you know, we do have. We go to the grocery store we eat. We sleep, you know, I mean, and those are things that we do. And if we were we would just if we were totally immersed in it, we wouldn't be able to do that.

But, but I think that confronting this reality that opens up the possibilities, and this is a spiritual journey. There's just so much and we're at this point in our calendar, where, you know, we've just we've just come off you know Ros Hashanah now which is sometimes called the birthday of the world. And I like to think of it as an image of a comet you know it swings by close and then it goes out fire and so this sort of energy of creation, the spiritual energy and creation that we swing by swing close to it. And Ros Hashanah, and we have maybe some more opportunity to, you know, we might be able to see the comment we might be able to really connect into that spiritual energy that is emanating from the creation as we continue to be partners with God and continuing to co create the world. And that so that there's kind of the opportunity for that spiritually at Ros Hashanah, not the new year and then you'll keep poor is also, it's this time for really spiritual introspection and really confronting ourselves and confronting who we are. And I think for a lot of people that experience was very different.

This year, we didn't need to imagine, we didn't need to imagine sort of the worst things that can happen to be in our liturgy talks about that that we're going to say that it's determined who will live and who will die and that our feet is sealed and you'll keep poor. So there's some things we have control over. And there's some things we don't have control over. And I think this liturgy is an acknowledgement of what we don't have control over.

But it's also talks about, you know, who's going to abide by fire and but this is all these images that are so much. They're not like we need to imagine that they're happening. The images in the Liturgy are things that are happening in our lives right now and so this intensity, I think, is greater. This year, in terms of confronting these concepts of this whole idea of how we don't know. You know, we know and we don't know. What are yours going to be and then we turn around and we build, you know, we immediately start building a Sukkah which is reminiscent of the booths of the Israelites when they were wandering in the desert.

And Sukkoth is in a, you know, an ancient Near East. It was this time where maybe it's going to rain and maybe it's not going to rain. And the mission of the first Dakota Jewish lot you know says, Well, you know, how do we know how much rain. Do we because we build this economy, it is to live in it to eat to sleep. Just basically to be out there all the time. How do we know when we need to leave? Well, when your porch gets filled with water because it's because open to the skies and then it gives this little parable about, well, it says so, you know, as though that the and it just, it says no, guys, throwing water on us because God's upset with us or something. So it's at this liminal time of year. And there's so many aspects of how we celebrate fortunate that are about liminality and we find in limbo times and spaces that sacred, whether it's the Muslims on the door or lighting candles in the evening. These times that are in between.

And you know, and some were in between or are always in between something, but in some way, we're more in between, then wherever have been because I totally agree with everything that Roger was saying at the beginning about where we are at. And maybe are in between. This is our acknowledgement are willing to open our eyes and see it. So, Idea of just up. First of all, seeing reality. We can't eat them to reality until we see it. And I think that our traditional allows for us to the opportunity to find times to where we are being really asked to you to reality. So it's at the end of suit coat, which we celebrate for a deals decent diaspora.

We then get to simple Torah, which is the celebration of the Torah and what is that about that's about the celebration of our source of strength and our source of wisdom and their source of their spiritual strength. And so then it's like, Okay, we're going to do this again. And we're also celebrating that we're going to start reading the Torah scroll over again. So we start reading it again because we know that next year. We're going to read it differently. And every year. It's going to be different, even though it's the same text for us, it's always going to be different because we're different name is. They just want to say one more thing, which is about individual collective responsibility. That's all I think that's built into Judaism. So yeah, and we want some time for questions in any way.