

Listen To Your Grandchildren

By Rabbi Arthur Green

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“One generation shall declare Your works to another...” (Psalm 145:4).

We Jews see our lives through a sense of continuity between generations. We are raised to believe that we have some vital truth to pass on to those who come after us, a precious legacy that we have received from our own ancestors. This is why we are so committed to educating our children in the ways of our people. Even Jews who possess only slight knowledge of the tradition feel an obligation to have their children know more, so that they too will be able to pass the message on.

This sense of legacy lives right at the heart of our Jewish identity. We *care* about future generations. But these days the question of legacy is clouded by deep and frightening questions. What will be the fate of future generations in a resource-starved and over-crowded world? Will the environment, especially in our industrialized nations, become so polluted that our grandchildren will face ill health and will fear to bring more children into the world? Will resources be so scarce that violence and war will plague those who come after us, struggling for clean air and water much more violently than our generation frets over oil? What can we do while we are still here to make for a better future for those who come after us?

We stand at a moment of pivotal change, an era when the generation that grew up in the “postwar” years of the late 20th century now has to make way for those who will live their lives in the 21st. The best educated among those young people understand well that the environment and its preservation is the most urgent cause of this new century. Unless we do something drastic about the way we humans use resources, all the rest of our dreams for the future will stand little chance of fulfillment. This is the most essential reason why educated young people, including the vast majority of Jewish college-age and post-college students, are fervent supporters of the Obama campaign.

Let me put it simply. We just cannot afford another four years of irresponsibility on the environmental front. Bush and Cheney allowed the oil companies to dictate environmental policy. They cynically used 9/11 to place terrorism, rather than climate change and other looming planetary issues, at the center of our national concern. Now McCain and Palin threaten more of the same. John McCain knows better (unlike Bush, he does believe in science) and once did support action on global warming, but since running for president he has fallen right into the pocket of big oil and coal, major contributors, as always, to the Republican coffers. Just listen to him holler “Drill, drill, drill.” He *knows* that’s nonsense, that offshore drilling will have no effect on oil prices for at least ten years, and then will be merely a trickle. But he has to support those who pay his bills. And Palin is much worse, not yet even understanding that human actions contribute to the melting icecap floating right into her own state!

Tom Friedman, one of the smartest guys around, has just published a book called *Hot, Flat, and Crowded*. He tells us that it is desperately urgent for us to break our addiction to dirty fossil fuels. We Americans make up three percent of the world's population but consume 25 percent of its oil. To do this, we send huge amounts of money to countries with regimes inimical to our own way of life. We Jews, of course, should have a special interest in not seeing billions in petrodollars flow each year from America to the Middle East. But the call for more "drilling" will not change that. It will only reinforce our addiction to fossil fuels. We need to switch massive amounts of our energy production to clean and renewable sources of energy like wind and solar. And we need to conserve, to live more modestly, to preserve resources for future generations. This can be done, but will take a massive effort, starting with leadership that is really committed to it. Barack Obama understands this; John McCain does not.

Ask your grandchildren. They know. That is why so many young Jews stand at the forefront of the environmental movement. They want and deserve a clean and healthy world in which to live. And only we can give it to them. November 4th is coming soon – Do the right thing.

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