

The FUTURE We Make



**How Jewish
kids are
taking action
with Hazon**

Introduction by Nigel Savage

CEO, HAZON: THE JEWISH LAB FOR SUSTAINABILITY

All societies establish demarcations between the opportunities and responsibilities of childhood and adulthood. The tradition of becoming a *b'nai mitzvah* is just one example of this, tracing back two millennia as a concept and at least six centuries in relation to being called up to the Torah.

But for much of the 20th century, becoming a *b'nai mitzvah* seemed mostly an occasion for a party and gifts.

What does being an adult actually mean? If you are celebrating becoming a *b'nai mitzvah* this year, you have a statistically decent chance of being alive in 2100. What will the world — its climate, its cities, its coastlines — look like then? What will New York or Miami look like? What will happen between now and then to the people living in the Indian subcontinent or Africa — or Israel? Which species will have become extinct?

There is a growing number of young people rightly asking these questions. That is why it has been important to me and Hazon to create the Jewish Youth Climate Movement to provide some infrastructure and support to the Jewish teens who understand that taking responsibility in the 21st century requires challenging all of us to confront these issues.

The key question to those of us who are adults: Will we listen to what they have to say?

Hazon: The Jewish Lab for Sustainability is the largest faith-based environmental organization in the US. The Jewish Youth Climate Movement, launched in 2019, is a program of Hazon.

I STARTED TAKING ACTION TO HELP THE ENVIRONMENT

at the beginning of the last school year, motivated by a variety of factors — foremost of which are the facts of the climate crisis. Learning that the temperature increase of the planet was causing more frequent floods, extreme heat, stronger hurricanes, the death of coral, and so much more, I knew I had to get involved in the Jewish Youth Climate Movement.

I'm also motivated in my activism by the stories and people I encounter. I remember when I found out about climate change. I was at a friend's house, devouring buttered popcorn and enjoying myself while watching *The Lorax* until I began to internalize the movie's message.

I was also inspired by Greta Thunberg, a teen like me who fearlessly stands up for what she believes in: saving the planet. I had to get involved for the beautiful fish; for my family that always makes me smile; for my friends, who make me laugh until it hurts; for my classmates, who sit around me in school and learn together; for my teachers, who taught me so many important skills; for the cute chubby babies; for the toddlers who love ice cream; for the poor with signs asking for money; and for support in a world that can be cruel. I had to get involved for my home state of Florida that has sandy beaches and amusement parks with long lines and for the next generation of people that will be stuck with the earth we leave to them, in whatever shape that may be.

I want people to know they are never too young to start helping the environment. As Jews, we have an obligation to improve the world. The first thing you can do is to talk to your parents about climate change. You can ask them questions about the crisis. You can also recycle, turn off the lights, eat less meat, and do so much more. You can pursue systemic change by joining the climate movement like I did all those months ago. Lastly, you should know that you are not alone; there are so many young people out there who also care about the environment.

Asher Sochaczewski, 10th grade

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“STANDING UP FOR WHAT YOU KNOW IS RIGHT IS NOT ALWAYS EASY. Especially if the one you face is bigger and stronger than you,” reads the forward to Eve Bunting’s *Terrible Things*. Every year on *Yom HaShoah*, the day of Holocaust remembrance, my elementary school teachers pulled this book from the shelf and read it to my class in a solemn tone. This Holocaust allegory uses different animal species to represent the various groups persecuted in the Holocaust. As each group of animals is taken by the *Terrible Things*, none of the other animals stand up for the captured group, which naturally infuriated me. Why don’t any of them realize what’s going on? Don’t they understand the consequences of their passivity?

But Little Rabbit, my favorite character, is the only one to challenge the injustice of the status quo. Little Rabbit inspires me to act on my responsibility to speak out against injustice in general, particularly in the case of the climate crisis. I’m not on the frontlines of the crisis, so climate change can feel like an “over there” issue, as Jonathan Safran Foer puts it in his book *We Are the Weather*. Right now, it seems like climate change is happening to other people. Other people are being affected by fatal floods; other people are battling powerful storms; other people are climate migrants. Other people, not me. But history has taught us that what happens to other people is our business. Little Rabbit galvanizes me to question the world as it is, and I joined the Jewish Youth Climate Movement partly because of my faith in youth power. We need to amplify each other’s voices until the Little Rabbits of the world prove that we’ve learned from our history to stand up for what’s right, even if it isn’t easy.

Raphaela Gold, 12th grade

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THE PERIL OF THE CLIMATE CRISIS is daunting to all of us, but as a child it can seem all the more intimidating. Even as a kid, social justice struck a chord with me, and I knew it was something I wanted to further explore. I canvassed for political campaigns and attended rallies advocating for everything from health care to immigration justice. When I attended my first meeting for climate advocacy, however, I was not empowered or excited for the work to come. Instead I was scared.

But when I pulled away all the demoralizing statistics and the complex politicization of the issue, I had a sense of childlike wonder. The same little kid inside me that is scared by the problems that plague the world is also a bit of an optimist. That kid sees a problem and says, “We can fix this.”

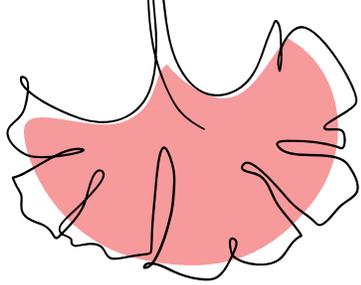
When I think of myself as that kid, I remember my mom reading to me Margaret Bloy Graham’s *Be Nice to Spiders*. That book was the same copy my grandmother read to my mom years before. Despite the story’s relative anonymity, the book was impactful in my life.

Like the protagonist, I learned my lesson to befriend and treat with respect the creatures that we share our planet with. While not everyone I know got the pleasure of reading *Be Nice to Spiders*, we all have a way that we can connect to a simpler side of our own being – a side that is content in the outdoors and the many marvelous facets of the earth’s flora and fauna. With that in mind, we can more easily remember why we’re here and what we’re striving for.

Lucy Waldorf, 10th grade

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THE COVER OF *THE LORAX* by Dr. Seuss is perfectly lighthearted, depicting bright trees and a fluffy creature with a giant mustache, but the inside of the book reveals a deeper message. This book is an illustration of who I am: the Lorax, waving my arms and shouting about the crisis we have created (and been born into). Whether it is climate change or environmental degradation, I see the urgency of the problems created by human greed.

Just as the Once-ler disregards the Lorax's warning, I often feel ignored and belittled when speaking to adults about the crisis. Our world is currently in peril, but many refuse to see the problem caused by our societal disregard for nature, our obsession with money, and our propensity to take without ever returning. This story revealed to me the power of a single individual's actions — how the choices one makes can drastically affect the world around us. The values represented in *The Lorax* are reflected in Judaism as well: Each of us has an obligation to protect the earth and our environment from exploitation. When I was a child, this book helped me understand the finite resources that our planet possesses and how easily they can be depleted.

We are living in the time right before the last Truffula Tree falls, protecting it from axes that hack. My generation holds the last seed and the responsibility to plant it. This book reminds me that "[u]nless someone like [me] cares a whole awful lot, nothing is going to get better. It's not." So now I wonder if I am actually the Lorax or in fact the little boy in this story. Am I the Lorax, standing up and speaking out against the atrocities others are committing against our planet, the one warning others of our grim future? Or am I the little boy, asking the old Once-ler how to fix what has already been done, learning from the mistakes of the past and creating solutions for the future? Perhaps I am a bit of both.

Bella Weksler, 12th grade

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Caring for our environment

is a central element of *tikkun olam*, repairing the world. Here are a few of our favorite PJ Library titles that center on this important Jewish value.



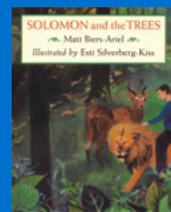
26 Big Things Small Hands Do
Ages 2 to 4 Years
Written by Coleen Paratore
Illustrated by Mike Reed

Caring for the environment may be a big job, but small hands can help. That's the message in this empowering book for little ones. In the words of Rabbi Tarfon, "It is not your responsibility to finish the work, but you are not free to desist from it either" (Pirkei Avot 2:21). None of us can fix the world all by ourselves, but each of us, no matter how young, can help out in meaningful ways.



The Forever Garden
Ages 6 to 7 Years
Written by Laurel Snyder
Illustrated by Samantha Cotterill

Laurel's beloved neighbor, Honey, is getting ready to move away. As she packs her belongings, Honey continues tending to her garden, even though she won't be there to enjoy its fruit. This sweet contemporary retelling of the Talmudic tale of Honi and the carob tree is a reminder that, as Honey tells Laurel, "This garden isn't really mine. ... It belongs to everyone."



Solomon and the Trees
Ages 8+ Years
Written by Matt Biers-Ariel
Illustrated by Esti Silverberg-Kiss

Long before he becomes king, Solomon spends much of his childhood convening with nature, talking with the animals and the trees. But when Solomon first ascends to the throne, he forgets his friends in the forest. In this beautiful *midrash*, Solomon comes to understand just how important it is to safeguard the earth — and gains the wisdom he is famous for.

DID YOU KNOW? The PJ Library website has a comprehensive database of every PJ Library book sent to families. Looking for a Rosh Hashanah book for 5-year-olds that teaches them to care for the environment? You can search for that! Visit pjlibrary.org/books and find the book you're looking for.