

# NEO-PAGANISM IN THE PUBLIC SQUARE AND ITS RELEVANCE TO JUDAISM

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*In today's fragmented society a large number of religious and secular neo-pagan expressions have emerged and are gathering strength. An increased interest in nature is a central element in many of its manifestations. Expressions of this attitude are found among neo-pagan believers, neo-Nazis and some extreme environmentalist currents.*

*The ancient revulsion with regard to paganism felt by adherents of Judaism links up with the need to take stock of these contemporary phenomena. The return of paganism forces Judaism to focus on Jewish law and tradition, which proclaim that God is central in the world. Nature is not sacred and its laws represent barbarity; the Noahide laws represent civil society. There are many reasons for Jewish observers to watch attentively which direction the powerful, renewed interest in nature will take, and what consequences this may have for world Jewry.*

While history seldom repeats itself, many of its major motifs recur over the centuries. The main reason for this is that, while man's social environment has changed radically over the millennia, this is not the case for his moral and mental nature and other essential characteristics. This repetition of motifs is frequently stressed by a variety of contemporary manifestations of idolatry, both in and outside of the public square. None of these are entirely

identical to the pagan rituals mentioned in the Bible. Nonetheless, like its predecessors, neo-paganism merits Jewish concern.

As modern phenomena do not have the same outward appearance as ancient ones, one can no longer invite visitors for a field trip around pagan Jerusalem, passing Astarte's holy poles, incense burning to Baal, or horse sculptures dedicated to the sun god.<sup>1</sup> One cannot let tourists experience religious prostitution — at least not in the literal sense of the word — nor show, as the excursion's high point, parents burning children at Molech's shrine in the Ben Hinnom valley.<sup>2</sup>

Astarte<sup>3</sup> and Baal are no longer worshipped, though one still has to pay to see sculptures of them at museums and archeological sites. In today's atmosphere one wonders whether they will not be pulled out one day — with or without the permission of the museum management — to be revered again. An Israeli museum curator once told me that she removed a statue of Buddha from an exhibition after finding somebody kneeling before it. There is indeed much to be said for the view that as a statue of Buddha is holy for many, it does not belong in a museum.

### Secular Aspects

Some neo-pagan expressions are religious, others secular. The latter concern secular religion, i.e., ideology, as well as popular culture. We also find indications of this in a business context. Semantics show this well: the pagan idiom has permeated the world's leading papers. Money-hungry people are considered to worship Mammon. Consumerism is called "a contemporary religion."

When *The Economist* wrote about Nobuhiko Kawamoto, the retiring chief executive of Honda, it mentioned that "he has worshipped fast machines all his life." When he became chief executive in 1960, "Honda was in thrall to its engineers, a priesthood housed in separate premises."<sup>4</sup>

*Time* magazine writes of the software programmer Linus Torvalds: "Pale, fleshy groupies surround him on all sides, adoration in their eyes....Some call him a god and want to be among his disciples, helping spread the word....He's 28 years old, and his religion is called Linux, after a piece of computer code he wrote for kicks in 1991, while a student at the University of Helsinki."<sup>5</sup> *The Financial Times* says the same in other words: "Linux is not just about software. Among devotees, the 'alternative' computer operating system has become a religion."<sup>6</sup>

While Marilyn Monroe was considered a “sex symbol,” semantics have since become more religiously influenced. Singers like Elvis Presley or Madonna and sport stars like Michael Jordan or Ronaldo are “idols.” When Jordan retired, a comment made by a well-known opponent after one of his early games was frequently quoted : “God has descended on the court.” A Dutch journalist told me that, in their championship years, the Ajax soccer players were often called “the sons of God” and at a Dutch crematorium one can have one’s urn buried in a lawn taken from the Ajax stadium.

On the twentieth anniversary of Presley’s death, more than 30,000 people participated in the procession past his grave. On that day, 5,000 of them visited Graceland, his former mansion, now a Presley museum. The others could not get in. Near the grave lay a 1.5 meter mountain of flowers and teddy bears. Memorabilia such as buttons and mugs with his picture are collected. On television, I once saw a woman who had been to Graceland and had found a toenail on one of its doormats which she now keeps and wonders whether this relic might have been Presley’s. This fits the do-it-yourself mode and calls up associations with the eighth century Christian heretic, Aldebert, who had an absolute hold over “his immediate followers....They were convinced that he knew all their sins, without their confessing them; and they treasured as miracle-working talismans the nail parings and hair clippings he distributed among them.”<sup>7</sup>

Other objects such as Presley’s hairs are put on altar-like contraptions. Some people claim that he has appeared to them as a revelation. An entire multi-faceted mythology has been built up round a country boy who, after his death, gives bliss to many people in a much shorter period than the other “country boy,” Jesus, from whom many of his fans derive the symbolism for their adoration.

### **The Diana Cult**

Above all, the late Princess Diana has become a universal icon and cult figure. In 1997, I visited Patagonia where a proud tea-house owner showed me a glass cupboard containing a teacup from which she had drunk during a visit a few years earlier. The dregs were still in there. The borders between “fascination with” and “adoration of” have been crossed. Diana’s burial place is becoming a secular shrine. Mythology is developing fast. The father of her lover hints that the accident was murder.<sup>8</sup> There is already

a walking tour around the main locations of her life in London. In Paris, a little park in her memory will be inaugurated within a school building which was closed a few years ago. In the building itself there will be a “children’s center for the discovery of nature.”<sup>9</sup> The latter links her memory to a fashionable subject.

There are guided tours in Paris from the Ritz hotel to the Seine quay where she, her playboy lover, and their drunk driver were killed, a secular version of the *Via Dolorosa*. Promiscuity is no longer a problem in the minds of a large part of the Western population, even if you are the mother of a future king.<sup>10</sup>

One can only wonder what underlying values are expressed by those societies which considered Diana’s death the world’s main event of 1997. A Jew must distance himself from the “Dianacult.” (This is just one more proof — for whoever needs it — that Judaism is out of sync with society’s mainstream.) One may commiserate with her but what is there to admire in this suicidal and neurotic person, a self-confessed adulteress, about whom perception dominates reality and fiction has become fact?

Apart from all this, the princess was also foolish. Her confession may put her children at the risk of having to do DNA tests in the future to prove their royal lineage. Some may claim that she bore her children before her promiscuity started. That is irrelevant, however, as raising this doubt will assure parliamentarians and media, respectively, of substantial attention and bigger sales. Diana did spend time on charity, but many other wealthy people do so without as much fuss being made about it. This cult is a contemporary expression of romanticism, a phenomenon whose affinity to paganism was recognized long ago.

Sex is another pagan motif dressed in new clothes. The ancient desire for sex under the auspices of the idol has been partly replaced by the modern desire for sex with him or her. In pre-Aids days, one could regularly read how popular singers found groupies in their bed when they returned to their hotel rooms. After he was discovered to have Aids, American basketball star Magic Johnson told the media that so many women had offered themselves to him that he could not resist. If he were to die early from unsafe sex, as Adonis did in the old days, this would again be a variation on an ancient motif. However, he will not necessarily be resurrected in the spring thereafter, as the god Tammuz was believed to be.

## Spiritual Elements

The spiritual and ritual elements of today's idolatry are still evolving and are part of a widespread search for "unconventional" religion. Like so many expressions of Western society, paganism is fragmented. Partly because of this, its overall impact cannot easily be assessed. Remnants of indigenous religions have survived in the Americas and have been revived in Europe.

Several Eastern religions which have come to the West are pagan or have pagan elements. One fashionable one is the modified teaching of Tantra, about which the *Wall Street Journal* wrote: "In the hands of America's New Age marketers, sex, or 'sexual healing,' is very much the point and profit is more often than not the motive. Trading on testimonials from Hollywood celebrities...and using a vocabulary borrowed from Hinduism and pop psychology, modern Tantra advocates are spinning Tantra into an eccentric market racking up perhaps tens of millions of dollars in annual sales."<sup>11</sup>

Neo-Nazism is another semi-religious ideology. One hears more about its racism than its pagan interests in nature, but the latter are there nonetheless. Few people realize — and contemporary German Greens prefer not to be reminded of it — that the first major nature-protection laws were issued, of all places, in Nazi Germany, which would prove to be the cruelest Western country with regard to humans.<sup>12</sup> There "any person engaged in such practices would be 'removed to a concentration camp.'"<sup>13</sup>

Twenty years ago already, the Dutch historian Lea Dasberg pointed out the dangers of an exaggerated "return to nature" approach: "The 'natural' has again become normative as a counterforce to culture. So soon after Nazism, which proclaimed the same, one has again forgotten what dangers the elevation of nature as a norm brings with it for the handicapped, the sexual outsiders, the elderly and inter-racial societies. Historical reflection should teach us that it has always been the rural and agrarian communities which have produced the destructive movements based on millenary thinking."<sup>14</sup>

The partial ideological affinity between Nazism and extreme environmentalism has been referred to by various authors, both Jewish and non-Jewish,<sup>15</sup> including Walter Laqueur,<sup>16</sup> Robert Pois,<sup>17</sup> Michael Wyschogrod,<sup>18</sup> and Luc Ferry.<sup>19</sup> This is a field which merits substantial additional research.

## Religious Neo-Paganism

Religious neo-pagans are yet another category. These are not necessarily provocative people.<sup>20</sup> A Jewish Harvard University student told me that, when asked about their religion, several of his non-Jewish colleagues answered that they consider themselves pagans. He added: "They are dour people, no different from other students."

In North America, Wicca or Witchcraft claims to be the fastest-growing religion. Whether that is true cannot be ascertained. Neither can the international spread of neo-paganism be assessed.

American rituals are not necessarily the same as those emerging in Eastern European countries, where the gods are Slav. The *Jerusalem Post* reported about a "grandly named June 20-25 World Pagan Congress" in Lithuania, a "sedate mix of ethnographers, hippies and New Age followers," with participants from Latvia, Russia, Britain, and the U.S.<sup>21</sup>

In Germany, there is a revival of "national" (*voelkische*) neo-pagan groups. This nationalism is characterized by its claim that the Northern race is different from other races.

Most neo-pagan groups are very small. Some, though, strive for recognition as an official religion. The Internet is an easy communication and propaganda vehicle. As an Italian paper put it: on the worldwide web, David is equal to Goliath.

Much but not all of neo-pagan ritual centers on nature.<sup>22</sup> There are many modes of veneration. In this splintered world, the sun god is making his re-entry. On May Day, some pagan fertility rites celebrate the sexual union of the gods, who replenish the earth. Equinox and solstice are festive days. One can communicate at appropriate moments with the spirits of one's ancestors or others. Animism is no longer exclusively confined to American Indians or African tribes. For those looking for a more selective nature religion, there is Druidism. Besides the serious movements there are also those who take matters less seriously. For playful Jews there is, or was, Hassidic Druidism which has among its scriptures one called Mishmash.<sup>23</sup>

With the possible exception of Satanists, neo-pagans do not sacrifice children, but cults sometimes lead to death in a different way: collective suicide. This was the case, for example, with Jim Jones and his followers in Guyana in the late 1970s. Others commit ritual murders: remember Charles Manson, almost a decade earlier.

The increase in nature worship may be explained by the attitude in contemporary Western society that anything is permitted.

This easy answer is most probably a wrong one. We should try to understand better where neo-paganism comes from and how it may develop. We will then see that there are many possible causes, some of which point in the same direction.

### **Nature's Return**

Central to this discussion is the revival of interest in nature on many fronts for a variety of both rational and irrational motivations. One rational reason is that the development of industrialization and consumerism has led to nature's increasingly being destroyed or damaged. A few decades ago, many First World lakes and rivers were already heavily polluted, without much being done about it. Vast numbers of trees were damaged by acid rain. Elsewhere in the world, arable land continues to be eroded and tropical forests to be felled.

A few years ago, an international body of scientists claimed to have definite proof that human activities affect the world's climate through global warming.<sup>24</sup> In the last few decades, people have begun gradually to realize that there is a problem with mankind's abuse of natural resources, and that something should be done about it. Today it seems strange to many of us that it has taken society so many years to recognize the problem of environmental degradation.

Re-evaluation of nature takes many forms. Some aspects may cause humanity serious problems in decades to come, as they may lead to people's focusing on wrong priorities. The signals are there for whoever wishes to see them. Some people risk their lives to protect whales and dolphins, or to report on tropical forests being felled.<sup>25</sup> It was much easier to mobilize millions of Western Europeans to boycott the Shell petroleum company, wanting to dump its Brent Spar oil platform in the Atlantic Ocean, than to put pressure on their governments to do something about the mass slaughter of humans in Bosnia or Rwanda. What, indeed, are the priorities of many modern nature lovers?

In Western societies often many people do not mind trees being planted to which sometimes 15-20 percent of the local population are allergic. There is some irony in it that the health problems these trees create then have to be alleviated by much maligned synthetic chemicals. The same people are opposed, however, even to marginal emissions from industrial plants from which part of the local community makes a living.

There are many other reasons for the resurgence of nature's role. One is an increased awareness that science can provide only limited explanations and solutions for the human condition. Nature is being rediscovered, now that technology and science have partly failed mankind's exaggerated expectations.

### **Virtual Society**

Yet another reason for the desire to return to nature is that society is becoming increasingly virtual. The media bring us what happens and mix it with fantasy. Getting closer to an issue may mean getting further away: who knows what is true and what is manipulation? People suspect that they are being manipulated without knowing how to prevent or unmask it. Perception influences, and thus often becomes, reality.

One of the important areas affected by this "virtuality" is money. It took a long time to replace barter trade with metal coins, a first modest step of virtualization. It took many centuries again to replace metal coins with paper money. Now we are rapidly moving to the cashless society.

Tomorrow one's deposits, debentures, shares, and other financial instruments may be wiped out by the mistake of a bank clerk, the attack of a computer terrorist, or the millennium bug. Somewhere in the computer, a chip may be embedded which will wipe it all off on the occasion of the millennium change or at any other future date. Many computer experts tell us that they intend to take all their money out of the bank in the last days of December 1999. This talk increases panic in a year which will have more than its fair share of apocalyptic forecasts anyway.

Secular apocalyptic thought is difficult to identify because it is not consolidated in a movement or thought current. However, it has permeated the mainstream of contemporary society and, as such, requires more detailed analysis. Just one indication of a commonly-quoted apocalyptic concept is Murphy's law: all that can go wrong, will go wrong. It is obviously a foolish thought. If it were substantially true, the insurance industry would have been wiped out long ago.

Despite all the talk of post-modernity, science and technology are rapidly proceeding further, not only creating problems as critics say, but solving many more. The advance of these flag-bearers of modernity causes unease in many people. In this virtual society, people are increasingly seeking something real, tangible, and durable, i.e., not subject to ever-changing manipulation. Na-

ture, which was around long before history started, ideally fills this role.

### **Mankind's Value Declines**

From the economists' perspective, nature's re-evaluation is simple to understand: the number of people in the world is increasing, while parts of nature are gradually disappearing. Thus the value of the abundant good "mankind" declines, and the value of the scarce good "nature" increases. In other words, killing people will preoccupy people relatively less, and animal and other ecosystem protection will become more central. Liberal attitudes toward abortion and euthanasia also fit into this reality.

One extremist environmental current "deep ecology" posits that humans should not have more rights than nature's other components. They claim that we should adopt bio-centric rather than anthropocentric approaches. If one were to take this to its logical extreme, this would mean that, in the case of a major fire, people should prefer the fire brigade to focus on saving endangered animal species rather than children, of whom there are so many.

This re-evaluation of nature refers not only to its monetary aspects, however: it is also expressed in other — often incoherent — ways. Organically grown food carries premium prices though there is little proof that it is healthier than other food. Bird-watching globetrotters may have a much more negative impact on nature's non-renewable resources than people gambling in an adjacent casino or those watching television at home. Those who do not wish to eat any pesticide residues, however small, may not realize that they are eating much larger quantities of natural poisonous chemicals.

We find nature's re-evaluation in many places where few people recognize it. At an international medical congress in Jerusalem, doctors reported that increasing numbers of people want to die a "natural death." Somebody from the audience remarked correctly: if that is so, why do they go to see doctors? One may consider this to be a matter of semantics only: what people mean is that they do not wish to suffer from modernity, i.e., technology, by having a low-quality life prolonged by the application of a variety of machines. Still, there is a general longing for a beautified imaginary past, which is perceived as "natural."

### Have All Other Ideas Failed?

The emergence of a variety of religious expressions of neo-paganism in modern Western society has to be partly seen against the background of this desire to return to nature. The idolaters are not necessarily implying that “anything is permitted.” Their message may well be the opposite: all other ideas have failed. This includes monotheistic religions, totalitarian ideologies, atheism, secular humanism, and science.

In the past two centuries, we have seen the belief in an invisible God first weakening, then being abandoned by substantial parts of Western society. Thus a spiritual vacuum was created. Major ideological weeds, i.e., secular religions like Communism, Fascism, and Nazism (in historical order), entered the increasingly barren public square. In this spiritual vacuum newly designed pagan ideas also reemerged.

The collapse of the last of the totalitarian ideologies, i.e., Communism’s demise at the end of the 1980s, left an even greater spiritual void to be filled, both in the minds of Westerners and in the public square of their societies.

Meanwhile, the *Zeitgeist* has changed. In the confused *fin de siècle* atmosphere and the fast-increasing complexity of Western society, individualism is more fashionable than collective approaches. This is also true for beliefs. Despite individualism, however, many wish at the same time to belong to larger communities, although with little permanent commitment. It is against this background that the Diana-cult needs to be seen. More commitment is shown in the trend to belong to vague, ill-defined movements, the most important of which are those wishing to protect nature. For those who desire greater commitment there are small neo-pagan groups and cults.

Their philosophy can be interpreted as “Man’s character has remained the same over the millennia. Let us thus return to the basics to which man has adhered from time immemorial, a religion intimately connected with sacred nature.” They do not necessarily accept old rituals as such, but often reconstruct new ones from ancient elements. These religions are thus new rather than ancient ones. They provide many opportunities for individual expression and each person can “construct” his own rituals. For pagan “reconstructionists” in search of ideas, Frazer’s *The Golden Bough* holds the potential of a considerable ready-made collection.<sup>26</sup>

*The Financial Times* reports that a clergyman of the Church of Ireland had a mystical experience through which “the feminine

aspect of the deity was revealed to him.” With his wife and sister “he was eventually inspired to set up a religion, the Fellowship of Isis, dedicated to the worship of goddesses of all kinds. Their home, a former garrison which has been in their family for more than 300 years, has since become the world center for this religion, with nearly 15,000 followers in 92 countries.” The basement has been divided by pillars “which makes it easy to divide the space into small altars. There is one for each sign of the zodiac, with appropriate references to the goddess. Leo, for example, has a statue of the Egyptian cat goddess Bast. Other altars include one devoted to clairvoyancy, with a crystal ball framed with the eyes from a peacock’s tail; another to Native Americans, complete with painted buffalo skin; and one to healing.”<sup>27</sup>

Neo-paganism is part of the search for roots and may be interpreted as a religious root therapy. Thus, not only is nature being re-evaluated in modern Western society’s thinking; with the return to prominence of the forests and the lakes, the spirits which lived in them have also been resurrected.

Many of these sects rightly see the worlds of both Jewish and Christian thought as their enemies. There is no place in monotheism for the divinity of nature to which humanity must bow. In it nature may be valued as a manifestation of God’s majesty, but it is not sacred. The adherents of the single God, Creator of the world, have a long record of destroying pagan idols and desecrating their holy places. While one may claim that a variety of the present forms of nature adoration are un-Jewish, many neo-pagan reconstructionists can be considered anti-Jewish.

### **Astrophysicists and the Weather**

The undermining of basic monotheistic beliefs comes from many other directions. This helps provide the infrastructure which enables nature worshippers to increase their self-confidence. Some may come from academics who have no affinity whatsoever with neo-paganism. Among neo-paganism’s de facto and unintended allies are various scientists who claim that an Antarctic rock of meteoric origin contains proof of microbial life on Mars, from which others derive that this dispersion of life through the universe is a proof against Divine creation. Other allies are prominent astrophysicists who claim that the world has not had a beginning but has been around forever.

Stephen Hawking relates how he was once invited to a conference on cosmology at the Vatican that was organized by Jesuits:

At the end of the conference, the participants were granted an audience with the pope. He told us that it was all right to study the evolution of the universe after the big bang, but we should not inquire into the big bang itself because that was the moment of Creation and therefore the work of God. I was glad then that he did not know the subject of the talk I had just given at the conference — the possibility that space-time was finite but had no boundary, which means that it had no beginning, no moment of Creation.<sup>28</sup>

Hawking, himself a modern icon, is not the only one unintentionally helping paganism. The weather does too, with its quirks. Is *El Nino* a secret agent of the heathens? A few more years of multiple natural disasters will greatly assist nature's reinstatement in the mainstream of society's consciousness.

### The Upgrading of Paganism

Although organized neo-paganism seems to be growing, it remains marginal. Neo-pagan groups may have prominent adherents, but they usually do not come out of the closet, a pre-condition for being in the public square.<sup>29</sup> This is likely to change when the opportunity presents itself.

There are signals of the possible upgrading of paganism in more prominent places. While these signals are weak, they are not totally insignificant. In the framework of a series of conferences on religion and ecology at Harvard University, the relationship between Judaism and the natural world was discussed. Several other conferences covered the relation to ecology of religions such as Shinto, Hinduism, and "indigenous traditions."

The organizers aim to find a common position of the world's religions on the environment. According to the concluding conference's draft planning document, "religious rituals are grounded in the dynamics of nature." As an American Jewish academic remarked to me, "One might have thought otherwise that in some religions it had something to do with revelation." Another quote from the same planning document: "certain distinctions also need to be made between the particularized expression of religion identified with institutional or denominational forms of religion and those broader world-views which animate such expression." One more sentence may clarify this somewhat: "To resituate human-earth relations in a more balanced mode will require both a

re-evaluation of world-views and a formulation of viable environmental ethics.”<sup>30</sup>

These aims can be translated into plain English: all religions are basically different brands of the same make and we had better unite their views under Harvard sponsorship. From a Jewish angle this can be summarized as: Judaism had better work out an ideological compromise to reach a common position with the pagans on its environmental world-views and ethics. It is a meager consolation that this “community of believers” does not yet include neo-pagans.

One type of paganism which does not seem to be making much of a comeback is the Greek-Roman model. This is hardly surprising, as it is one of the founding elements of Western civilization against which neo-paganism is a reaction.

### **Astrology**

Other beliefs which reflect ancient ideas related to paganism have permeated mainstream society even more deeply. The horoscope is an integral part of many respectable Western newspapers, including Israeli ones. It is so common that many superficial readers of the latter would be shocked to be told that they are following marginal pagan rituals. Language has lost its meaning here. Editors recommend their papers’ astrologers to their readers as being “serious and conscientious.” It is difficult to guess in what way they differ from their competitor’s. One may read one’s future in many ways; the stars are not alone. Numerology, reading Tarot cards, and crystal ball gazing are also flourishing.

Magic shops seem to be well established in major Western cities, and are not always to be found in back alleys. If there were no demand for their books, cult objects, and other wares, they would have vanished long ago. When Nancy Reagan was First Lady of the United States, she regularly consulted her astrologer. So did Princess Diana. Probably many more politicians do this than we are aware of.

While astrology has a place in some Jewish traditions, classical Judaism’s attitude to witchcraft has always been unequivocal: “A man also or a woman that divineth by a ghost or a familiar spirit, shall surely be put to death.”<sup>31</sup>

## **Extra-Terrestrials and Computer Power**

There are many more murky ideas which have penetrated the Western world. I have heard some scholars state that part of the interest in extra-terrestrials has a religious character, and others claim that we are likely to see soon the emergence of religious practice around the computer.

As for aliens, coming in sophisticated vehicles from elsewhere in the universe, they seem to be redesigned and mechanized angels. The old discussion on the latter's sex may be recycled as well. Current motifs are again mutations of ancient ones. Angels have superhuman qualities, and aliens have technological capabilities beyond our comprehension, of which the creation of energy out of nothing is one of the most elementary ones. While angels often protect people and guide them to safety, aliens, however, seem regularly to abduct people and submit them to strange medical examinations in their flying saucers. In the meantime one does not know whether communication with them is a one- or two-way street, an ideal perplexity around which to build an alternative religion.

A small but indicative sample has already been given above with respect to the semantics of potential computer religion. On the other hand, although the automobile — an equally central piece of equipment in modern human life — is for many a fascinating object, one can hardly claim that it has become one of veneration, other than in exceptional cases. So why should the computer?

One can only speculate here. Several decades ago already cybernetics experts foresaw the possibility that ultimately the computer would control man rather than the reverse. If the computer indeed becomes that powerful, to consider him a god may be a small step for some. With respect to computers, religious veneration of the superior may thus move from a divine to a technological category.

## **Extreme Environmental Currents: A Major Pagan Carrier?**

Various, ill-defined spiritual interests have developed in recent years. A few years ago, a best-selling book, *Dialogue with Nature* by Irene van Lippe-Biesterfeld, the sister of the Dutch queen, revealed how she talks with dolphins and trees, and how

these elements of nature give her answers before she takes important decisions. This is not classical tree-worship, but it comes close to it. In 1998 this was followed by another book, *Nature as Family*, which contained the reactions of tens of people who followed her courses on how to conduct a dialogue with nature. One of the princess's words of advice is to go outside and feel which element — water, air, sun, fire or earth — one belongs to and greet it in one's own way.

Famous American precursors of modern environmentalism such as Muir<sup>32</sup> and Thoreau<sup>33</sup> expressed strange ideas or behaved oddly. In the next century, some of the more extreme currents of modern environmentalism may well become a significant vehicle for the spreading of neo-pagan ideas and pseudo-religious concepts linked to nature. Here, I can only refer to this briefly, although these ideas and their influence in the public square merit a fully-fledged discussion.

In the fragmented, even splintered, world of modern environmentalism, neo-pagan ideas have emerged separately from many pragmatic approaches. In environmentalism one can find elements of modernism, anti-modernism and post-modernism. Many environmentalists pursue rational goals, rightly claiming that decades of Western focusing on economic expansion have resulted in irresponsible neglect of the environment. On the other hand, neo-pagan and other pseudo-religious concepts are hidden features of the powerful, partly amorphous construct which some more extreme Green activists develop.

It is difficult to gain a coherent understanding of modern environmentalism, lacking as it does a single main force. It is still in great flux. The issue is indeed complicated, because the movement embraces so many individuals with exclusively pragmatic goals. Frequently its adherents have only a single purpose: for instance, those whose sole environmental desire is that no noisy highway or electric transformer station be built next to their house. These people usually do not care at all about the spiritual aspects of environmentalism. One should certainly not accuse mainstream environmentalism of being related to neo-paganism, though some of its extreme segments definitely are.

Several Jewish authors have identified these pagan traits in environmentalist currents.<sup>34</sup> Among these are Michael Gillis, who writes that the "pagan view can give rise to worship of animals, the sea, the soil or whatever. People are subject to these divinities and can only seek harmony with them. Such a view is manifestly ecological....Ecologism is thus secular paganism."<sup>35</sup>

Wyschogrod is the one who most unequivocally equates some currents of environmentalism with paganism. He states that “upper ecology is ‘nature religion,’ primarily a religious attitude toward nature....In relationship to the divine, upper ecology usually expresses itself as polytheism, the theological view that there are many gods. These gods dwell within the forces of nature and are symbols of these forces.”<sup>36</sup>

Other Jewish writers who refer to pagan trends in parts of the environmental movement are Aaron Lichtenstein,<sup>37</sup> Norman Lamm,<sup>38</sup> and Eilon Schwartz.<sup>39</sup> Similar observations have been made by Christian authors.<sup>40</sup>

### **Judaism, Environmental Matters, and the Long Struggle of Monotheism**

While ideological environmentalism is incompatible with classical Judaism, many aspects of pragmatic environmentalism are immanent in it. Jewish law (*halakhah*) refers to a multitude of measures which would now be described as “protecting the environment,” even if Judaism defines them differently. *Bal tashchit*, the biblical commandment forbidding wanton destruction, is one of them; *tza'ar ba'alei hayyim*, the commandment to avoid unnecessary suffering to animals, is another. These are only two examples among many.

While pragmatic approaches may often be similar, the values of Jews and fundamental environmentalists, however, are radically different. Norman Lamm, president of Yeshiva University, stated that he refused to participate in a major ecology conference because it focused around the concept that “nature is sacred.”<sup>41</sup>

One example of how over-enthusiastic Jewish environmentalism can lead to the propagation of pagan thought is the dust-jacket of *Ecology & the Jewish Spirit*. The editor of this book, Ellen Bernstein, is the founder of *Shomrei Adamah*, a group of Jewish environmentalists in the United States. She has put much effort into introducing ecological thinking into the Jewish community. However, enthusiasm on the borderlines of Judaism sometimes leads to crossing them.

The dust-jacket texts are permeated by idolatry. The publisher’s statement says: “The ancient Israelites, like all our ancestors, depended on nature for their daily livelihood. Rain and crops determined their fate. Nature was an integral part of their lives and of their faith [*The latter is highly ambiguous unless it refers to offering sacrifices to Baal — MG*]...*Ecology & the*

*Jewish Spirit* describes the wisdom the Jewish tradition has to offer all of us, to help nature become a sacred, spiritual part of our own lives."<sup>42</sup>

Not surprisingly, the book's endorsements from (probably non-Jewish) environmentalists eagerly embrace these concepts. For example: "This timely collection, bringing out the ecological soul of Judaism, is a cause for celebration. Its many refreshing voices call Jewish spirituality to reawaken to its own glad reverence for Earth."<sup>43</sup> And "For the first time, a book that illuminates the guiding role that nature plays in human affairs....A welcome and powerful voice is now added to all those dedicated to preserving the integrity and sacred quality of the planet earth."<sup>44</sup>

### Principles and Practice

The ancient revulsion with regard to paganism felt by adherents of Judaism links up with the need to take stock of contemporary phenomena. The long struggle of monotheism against paganism began with Abraham's recognition of God more than 3,500 years ago. When the Israelites received the Torah on Sinai hundreds of years later, strong warnings were issued against various types of idolatry. They were told to destroy the pagan gods and their infrastructure upon entering the Land of Israel.<sup>45</sup> *Halakhah* indicates how central this struggle against paganism is. In times of danger to life, the Jew is allowed to abandon all the Torah's commandments with three exceptions: murder, incest, and idolatry.<sup>46</sup>

The Israelites did not always adhere even to these important commandments. The Bible details the prophets' repeated efforts to convince the people to stop venerating pagan deities. Many, if not most, of their kings did not listen; neither did the people. For centuries the cult of the local Baal remained "religiously correct." The Israelite farmer often sacrificed to him in the hope that the idol would influence the yield of his fields.<sup>47</sup> It was only after the Babylonian exile that God's hold on the beliefs of the Jewish people strengthened more permanently.

In most of the last two thousand years, the Jews have had little time, possibility, or desire to propagate monotheism to humanity. With the penetration into many pagan societies of two monotheistic religions, Christianity and Islam, the outside challenges to Judaism changed. The paganism which survived in the diaspora societies was not an explicit religion: it was mainly expressed as syncretism. In recent centuries it seemed to have been confined to

the past. It is doubtful whether, by that time, many Jews were aware that one had to say a blessing when coming to a place from which paganism had disappeared. After being the first ones to recognize a single God, the Jews became minor actors in the historical struggle against paganism.

As far as paganism was concerned: why fight it if it had faded away from most societies where Jews lived? The developments in this soon-ending century indicate that this was too hasty a conclusion.

We cannot know the future. In today's chaotic and rapidly evolving world, we ignore the directions that contemporary paganism may take and how influential it may become. Yet we cannot exclude the possibility that it will get a syncretistic grip on many secularists as well as disillusioned monotheists.

### **Tolerant Paganism/Intolerant Monotheism?**

What should Judaism's attitude be with respect to both neo-pagan religions and extreme environmentalists? In order to answer the questions, we must first ask: why is the fight against idolatry so central in Judaism? We are helped to comprehend this by rephrasing it in the language of our time: "Why is the Jewish God so jealous? Why is He so intolerant of pagan deities and idolaters? Aren't Jews intolerant and weren't pagans tolerant? Polytheists did not care whether there is one deity more or less. All gods are welcome."

Halbertal and Margalit explain the conflict, saying:

monotheism, in its war against polytheism, is an attempt to impose unity of opinions and beliefs by force, as a result of an uncompromising attitude toward the unity of God. Polytheism, by contrast, by its very nature includes an abundance of gods and modes of ritual worship, and so it has room for different viewpoints and beliefs and therefore is pluralistic. This pluralism is not just the product of compromise but is in fact an ontological pluralism that constitutes a deeper basis for tolerance.<sup>48</sup>

The language is misleading. What is presented as "tolerant paganism" included the permissiveness of religious prostitution and the cruelty of human sacrifices.

Pagans were cruel indeed. To deflate the myth of pagan tolerance, one may quote a text from the ninth century Assyrian rule Assurnasirpal:

600 of their warriors I put to the sword; 3,000 captives I burned with fire; I did not leave a single one of them alive to serve as a hostage....Hulai, their governor, I flayed, and his skin I spread upon the wall of the city; the city I destroyed, I devastated, I burned with fire....From some I cut off their hands and fingers; and from others I cut off their noses, their ears...of many I put out their eyes. I made one pillar of the living and another of heads, and I bound their heads to tree-trunks round the city.<sup>49</sup>

Admittedly this is general-purpose cruelty and not the religion-derived variety, but does that matter?

### **A Calibrated Message**

For several prominent writers in the environmental context, paganism scores higher than monotheism. The historian Lynn White wrote in a much-quoted article:

In antiquity every tree, every spring, every stream, every hill had its own *genius loci*, its guardian spirit. These spirits were accessible to men, but were very unlike men; centaurs, fauns, and mermaids show their ambivalence. Before one cut a tree, mined a mountain, or dammed a brook, it was important to placate the spirit in charge of that particular situation, and to keep it placated. By destroying pagan animism, Christianity made it possible to exploit nature in a mood of indifference to the feelings of natural objects.<sup>50</sup>

This view that paganism is more pro-nature than the Bible has been challenged by various Jewish authors, including David Shapiro: "That pagan man has produced some of the greatest destroyers of nature is apparently ignored. Pagan man worshipped all forces of nature, the good and the bad. There was no more divinity attached to beneficence than to destructiveness. Aphrodite-Venus is a goddess and Ares-Mars is a god. Krishna, the beneficent, and Shiva, the destroyer, are both gods. Why should paganism be more concerned with the preservation of nature than the Bible? Everything...points in the very opposite direction."<sup>51</sup>

White was wrong with regard to Judaism. Its environmental message is finely calibrated: it sees nature as having its place in the Divine universe, but not as its master. It should not be abused and destroyed, but it can be used for man in a reasonable way. Nature cannot be sacred, though land can be, if God's presence manifests itself there. We know this from God's words to Moses:

“And He said, ‘Do not come closer. Remove your sandals from your feet, for the place on which you stand is holy ground.’”<sup>52</sup> A similar thing happens with Yehoshua.<sup>53</sup>

The Bible conveys two major messages regarding nature as God’s creation. The first is that it is a manifestation of God’s majesty, and man should recognize this; the second is that God may use it as He wishes and change it at will. For the modern nature-believer, such views are close to heresy.

### Judaism and the Laws of Nature

*Halakhah* is the antithesis of the laws of nature. The latter are cruel: there is no charity in nature; there is no mercy. There is no safety net in nature for marginal beings. The strong eat the weak. The old are abandoned. In the Bible, the Utopian Latter Days are characterized by the disappearance of these characteristics from the world, when Isaiah prophesies that “the wolf shall dwell with the lamb...the cow and the bear shall graze...a babe shall play over a viper’s hole.”<sup>54</sup>

Meanwhile, the image of the wolf in Western society is already rapidly changing. A few decades ago it was considered a ferocious predator and in folklore, it was perceived as a devourer of grandmothers. Nowadays we are told that it does not usually attack human beings; rather than being hunted, it has become a highly protected animal within the framework of the Bern convention.

One can hardly imagine a movie more out of sync with the contemporary mood than Hitchcock’s “Birds.” We also find the return of nature in the frequent use of biological metaphors.<sup>55</sup> Thus computers also suffer from viruses and millennium bugs. The highly ambiguous expression used by exalted environmentalists “healing the planet” is yet another manifestation of the returning centrality of nature; so is “the death of the oceans.” As a sign of closeness to animals, man has given names to an increasing number of them. Not only do house pets have names, but also whales off the Argentinian coast, which makes it easier to adopt them financially; even hurricanes have been added to the name-bearing category in nature.

There is no equality in nature or anything resembling democracy. Nature should be feared. Volcanic eruptions sometimes cause as much damage as atom bombs. Earthquakes wipe out communities. The expression “forces of nature” has a clear undertone of uncontrolled violence.

### **Nature's Image**

When we discuss nature's image, truth, half-truth, and fallacy are intertwined.<sup>56</sup> Nature is presented in a benign way. "Nature knows best" is a foolish expression. It is fashionable to think about natural products in a positive way and about synthetics in a negative one. Some natural poisons are thousands of times more toxic than the most lethal synthetic chemicals. Some water streams are rich in arsenic, and contain more natural poison than the sewage of heavily polluting industries. An extreme form of all this is the self-hatred of those who implicitly claim "Nature is good, man is bad." As many of us are not yet used to abstract mythology, we do not recognize it easily for what it is.

Another popular slogan of our time is that man should learn to "live in harmony with nature." Those who propagate it hardly understand what they are promoting. Firstly, if man had done so, his average life-span would have remained at thirty years or so. Furthermore, I postulate that no nation in the twentieth century has lived as much "in harmony with nature" as Hitler's Germany. Blood and soil became central values. In the pseudo-religious world of national socialism, nature and its rule, i.e., the survival of the fittest, played an important role. Not surprisingly, the Jews, the people who introduced moral laws into society, were to be wiped off the earth.

At the same time new negative characteristics have been attributed to certain human beings. They are "alienated from nature." This tag is at least as negative as being "undemocratic" and even less precisely defined. The one modern Jewish thinker, however, who vaunts an alien attitude toward nature is Steven S. Schwarzschild. He wrote:

In my philosophy department the graduate students organize an annual picnic. For some time past quasi-formal invitations have explicitly excluded me on the ground that I am known to be at odds with nature. So I am. My dislike of nature goes deep: non-human nature, mountain ranges, wildernesses, tundra, even beautiful but unsettled landscapes strike me as opponents, which, as the Bible commands (Gen. 1:28-30), I am to fill and conquer. I really do not like the world, and I think it foolish to tell me that I had better....One explanation of my attitude is historical. My paternal family lived in Frankfurt-on-the-Main, where I was born, since before 1500. We have been urban for well over half a millennium.<sup>57</sup>

Schwarzschild is very much the odd-man-out among those writing about Judaism and the environment; apologetics around the urban

character of Jews — and thus their supposedly limited interest in nature and the environmental movement — are more common among contemporary Jewish writers.

Anybody who places nature as the central value in society must be suspect in the eyes of Jews. One should not lump together neo-Nazis, neo-pagans, and extreme environmentalists. Yet all should be watched carefully by Jews, even if the degree of worry they cause greatly differs.

### **The Noahide Laws**

In the Torah, God tells not only the Jews but also humanity in general that they should not live according to the laws of nature. Judaism totally rejects the “animal in man” and attempts to suppress it. Among the 613 commandments given to the Jews, there are seven which Judaism considers binding for all humanity. Non-Jews are expected to practice these Noahide laws at the very least: they prohibit idolatry, the vain use of God’s name, murder, sexual transgressions, theft, and eating the flesh of live animals, and require all people to establish courts of law to govern themselves. Two of these commandments are relevant to man’s relation with nature: not eating the flesh of live animals, and the recognition of God and the prohibition of idolatry. The latter forbids revering nature or any part of it as sacred.

These Noahide laws are Judaism’s central message to the world. A world which would study these laws and adhere to them would be a much more moral place than the one we live in today. Judaism is not a universal religion in the sense that it has to take a position on everything which happens in the world. Anybody familiar with the strategic aspects of propagating ideas knows that it is counterproductive to focus on secondary issues: the human mind can retain only a limited number of messages.

### **A Jewish Return to the Sources?**

The re-emergence of paganism has particular significance for Judaism. There are some indications that Jews are disproportionately active in neo-pagan groups, particularly in the U.S.<sup>58</sup> Even more importantly, however, it admonishes us that Jews should focus again on the basic attitude of the Jewish legal and value system toward nature and those who venerate it. In recent decades some diaspora Jews, most of whom are remote from the obser-

vance of most Jewish laws, have been telling the world that some of Judaism's central values are to fight against the American involvement in Vietnam, to eliminate nuclear weapons, to foster civil rights in the United States and human rights in the world, and to protect the environment.

The extent to which classical Judaism deals with the values underlying these issues varies. One thing is clear: these are derivatives and not Judaism's central messages to the world. Important as they may be, emphasizing them in isolation distorts what Judaism is about.

The main Jewish message to the world is very different and focuses on other matters. The Noahide laws are the essence of Jewish universalism. They stress human duties. Human rights are only derived from these duties, and are not the basis from which Judaism starts. If the commandments are not respected, human rights automatically *de facto* disappear.

### **Establishing a Watch**

Searching for the central values of Judaism, we cannot invent or re-invent them: they have been defined by classical Judaism. Trying continually to twist them to fit the passing fashions of the surrounding world not only means distorting them, it is also politically and strategically unwise.

So what does the return of paganism mean for Judaism? It forces us to focus on the importance of Jewish law and tradition, which proclaims that nature is not the dominant force in the world, nor is it sacred. There is a unique divine force above nature. Nature's laws represent the world of the savage and barbarian; the Noahide laws represent civil society. Civilization must be intolerant toward barbarity. No compromise is possible between the monotheist God and the polytheist deities.

The Jewish agenda is a very long one. Many things assimilated Jews consider important should be pushed down the Jewish agenda. The new outside reality should help us understand that propagating the Noahide commandments to humanity should have had a higher place on this agenda a long time ago.

It is not very clear where we are going. We live in a rapidly changing world where we must continuously catch weak signals and watch whether they get stronger. Nothing good for the Jews — nor for society at large — can come out of a worldwide strengthening of paganism. The same goes for a distorted emphasis on the importance of nature.

One popular mode of civic action today is the establishment of “watches.” If a certain phenomenon is worrying, one develops ongoing documentation on what is happening so that, if threats arise, one is mentally prepared and can react. If, indeed, protecting nature is a key issue of the next century, there seem to be enough reasons for Jewish observers to watch which direction this powerful, renewed interest in nature will take, and what consequences this may have for world Jewry. This refers to both the religious focus on nature of neo-paganism and the ideological one of extreme environmentalist currents.

### Notes

- \* An abbreviated version of this essay was published as a *Jerusalem Letter/Viewpoints* and was originally presented at the 1998 JCPA Summer Workshop on Jewish Political Studies, on the theme of “Religion in the Public Square.”
1. “He did away with the horses that the kings of Judah had dedicated to the sun, at the entrance of the House of the Lord.” II Kings 23:11.
  2. “He also defiled Topheth, which is in the Valley of Ben-Hinnom, so that no one might consign his son or daughter to the fire of Molech.” II Kings 23:10.
  3. “The king also defiled the shrines facing Jerusalem, to the south of the Mount of the Destroyer, which King Solomon of Israel had built for Ashtoreth, the abomination of the Sidonians, for Chemosh, the abomination of Moab, and for Milcom, the detestable thing of the Ammonites. He shattered their pillars and cut down their sacred posts and covered their sites with human bones.” II Kings 23:13-14.
  4. *The Economist*, July 4, 1998.
  5. *Time*, October 26, 1998, p. 70.
  6. *The Financial Times*, February 3, 1999.
  7. Norman Cohn, *The Pursuit of the Millennium: Revolutionary Millenarians and Mystical Anarchists of the Middle Ages* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970), p. 43.
  8. See, for instance, “7 Days supplement,” *Yediot Acharonot*, November 6, 1998.
  9. *de Telegraaf*, August 28, 1998 (Dutch).
  10. Idols can fall, however, for instance if they are suspected of murder; see O.J. Simpson.
  11. Asra Q. Nomani, “Ancient Hindu Sex Practice Gets a New-Age Makeover,” *The Wall Street Journal*, December 7, 1998. “Tantra, as a quasireligious doctrine, dates back 4,000 years to India; its first texts were in Sanskrit and its original adherents practiced ritual copulation — essentially, for them, a form of yoga meant to achieve

- an arrest of all mental processes en route to a mystical bond with the 'oneness of the universe.' As part of those beliefs, women were goddesses meant to be worshipped by men on the path to mutual cosmic bliss. Sex was the means, but not the point."
12. "It is, of course, painful to acknowledge how ecologically conscientious the most barbaric regime in modern history actually was. Exterminating millions of lives was not at all incompatible with passionate protection for millions of trees." Simon Schama, *Landscape and Memory* (New York: Vintage Books, 1996), p. 119.
  13. "In Nazi eyes, biomedical science was a heavily Jewish — that is, polluted — profession, while, in contrast, animals were symbols of nature and purity." James M. Jasper and Dorothy Nelkin, *The Animal Rights Crusade: The Growth of a Moral Protest* (New York: Free Press, 1992), p. 24.
  14. Lea Dasberg, *Pedagogie in de Schaduw van het Jaar 2000 of Hulde aan de hoop* (Amsterdam: Boom Meppel, 1980), p. 23 (Dutch).
  15. See Manfred Gerstenfeld, *Judaism, Environmentalism and the Environment* (Jerusalem: Jerusalem Institute for Israel Studies and Rubin Mass, 1998), p. 76ff.
  16. "Much of the Green programme can be accepted with equal ease by people from the Right and the Left of the political spectrum. It has not come as a surprise therefore that the extreme Right has been active among them....'Blind industrialization,' 'materialist consumerism,' soulless modern society and generally speaking the excesses of modern technology were strongly opposed by the Nazi party, which always stressed the need to return to nature, to a simpler and healthier life." Walter Laqueur, *Germany Today: A Personal Report* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1985), p. 58.
  17. "Hitler sounded remarkably like contemporary environmentalists who, with ample reason, proclaim that a sharp-tempered Mother Nature, weary of pitiful man's toying with her inflexible laws, will eventually avenge herself upon those who, at least since the onset of industrialization, have tried her patience." Robert Pois, *National Socialism and the Religion of Nature* (London: Croom Helm, 1986), pp. 37, 42.
  18. Michael Wyschogrod, "Judaism and the Sanctification of Nature," *Melton Journal*, no. III (Spring 1992):6-7.
  19. "There is nothing accidental in the fact that we owe to the Nazi regime until today the two most elaborate types of legislation which humanity has known on the subject of the protection of nature and animals." Ferry points out that one finds no mention of these laws in contemporary environmental literature — other than some marginal observations by opponents of the Greens: these laws were the first in the world "to reconcile a sizable ecological project with the desire for a real political intervention." Luc Ferry, *Le nouvel ordre ecologique* (Paris: Grasset, 1993), p. 54 (French).
  20. Halbertal and Margalit describe this category: "there have been people in the modern age who have adopted the label of 'pagans'

- for themselves, whether with the intention of provoking the attackers of paganism or in order to confront them with a system of values that rejects its critics.” Moshe Halbertal and Avishai Margalit, *Idolatry* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994), p. 7.
21. *Jerusalem Post*, June 23, 1998.
  22. One source defines the neo-pagan spectrum as ranging from new Indian religiosity, Afro-American cults such as voodoo, extreme feminist witch circles (Wicca), new Celtic Druid orders, and organizations of neo-Germans. The transitions between them are fluid. *KSA Informationsdienst Sekten- und Weltanschauungsfragen*, 2 (1998):8 (German).
  23. Margot Adler, *Drawing Down the Moon: Witches, Druids, Goddess-Worshippers, and Other Pagans in America Today*, rev. ed. (New York: Penguin, 1986), p. 325.
  24. Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, *IPCC Second Assessment Climate Change*, 1995.
  25. So, for instance, the *Time* special issue, “Our Precious Planet” (November 1997) mentions three Western environmentalist activists wresting incriminating information from illegal loggers in the Cambodian forests.
  26. James G. Frazer, *The Golden Bough: The Roots of Religion and Folklore* (Avenel, New Jersey: Random House, 1981), originally published in 1890.
  27. *The Financial Times*, January 23-24, 1999.
  28. Stephen W. Hawking, *A Brief History of Time: From the Big Bang to Black Holes* (New York: Bantam Books, 1990), p. 116.
  29. Adler, *op. cit.*
  30. Planning Document for the Culminating Conferences: “Religions of the World and Ecology” Conference Series, Harvard University, September 25-27, 1998.
  31. Leviticus 20:27.
  32. When the thinker Ralph Waldo Emerson visited Muir in Yosemite Park, the latter told him, “‘You are a sequoia yourself. Stop and get acquainted with your big brothers.’ But Emerson, at this late moment in his life, probably did not feel much like a sequoia.” Schama, *op. cit.*, p. 573.
  33. Schama relates an incident described in *Walden*, in which Thoreau was
 

seized with an overwhelming urge to eat raw woodchuck. It was not that he was particularly hungry....It was simply the force of wildness he suddenly felt possessing his body like an ancient rage. ‘Once or twice...I found myself ranging the woods, like a half-starved hound, with a strange abandonment, seeking some kind of venison which I might devour, and no morsel could have been too savage for me.’ So when the woodchuck shambled across his path, it was merely the ‘wildness which [it] represented’ that tempted Thoreau to grab it and tear it apart....Thoreau *feared* the resurgence of

the predator-animal in him because he was, in fact, deeply ambivalent about the primitive instinct within humanity.

Schama, *op. cit.*, p. 571.

34. See Gerstenfeld, *Judaism, Environmentalism and the Environment*.
35. Michael Gillis, "Ecologism: A Jewish Critique," *L'Eylah*, no. 34 (September 1992):6-8. For Gillis, the philosophical roots of this are the pantheism of Spinoza and the Romantics, as well as the vitalism of Bergson, with which an ethical element is fused to care for the earth, regarded by some as a living being.
36. Wyschogrod, *op. cit.*
37. Aaron Lichtenstein, "Man and Nature: Social Aspects," in *Judaism in Our Modern Society* (Jerusalem: Israel Ministry of Education, Branch for Religious Culture, 1971) (Hebrew).
38. "There is something atavistically pagan about this worship of the earth; the first verse of the Torah immediately establishes the incommensurability of Creator and creation when it tells us that God created the heavens and the earth." Lamm, *op. cit.*
39. "Some ecofeminists have called for a renewal of pagan customs of May day, celebrations of the moon, and witchcraft; one of the more radical biological theories of our day holds that the earth is a living organism, and has named her Gaia, the name of the Greek earth goddess." Eilon Schwartz, "Judaism and Nature: Theological and Moral Issues to Consider While Renegotiating a Jewish Relationship to the Natural World," *Judaism*, vol. 44, no. 4 (Fall 1995):439.
40. So, for instance, Eckhard Türk points out that the spectrum of neo-paganism in Germany ranges from "nature religious ecologists" to "esoteric Hitlerists." While neo-paganism is highly diversified, it is unified in its motivation "to be a counter-cultural and against-the-churches oriented movement." He adds that in increasingly unstable times, it cannot be excluded that in neo-paganism again there is the frightening willingness of young Germans "to adhere to an ideology of magic, strength and nature." Eckhard Türk, *KSA, op. cit.*
41. Norman Lamm, "A Jewish View of the Environment and Ecology," lecture given at the Technion, Haifa, Israel, October 7, 1996.
42. Ellen Bernstein ed., *Ecology & the Jewish Spirit* (Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights, 1998), publisher's statement, dust-jacket.
43. Joanna Macy, *ibid.*, dust-jacket.
44. Thomas Berry, *ibid.*, dust-jacket.
45. "You must destroy all the sites at which the nations you are to dispossess worshipped their gods, whether on lofty mountains and on hills or under any luxuriant tree. Tear down their altars, smash their pillars, put their sacred posts to the fire, and cut down the images of their gods, obliterating their name from that site." Deuteronomy 12:2-3.
46. Maimonides did not go along with this. He considers the prohibition of murder more important than committing idolatry.
47. Thus the Bible describes the sins committed by the people of Judah in the time of King Rehoboam, son of Solomon: "They too built for

themselves shrines, pillars, and sacred posts on every high hill and under every leafy tree; there were also male prostitutes in the land." I Kings 14:23. In the same kingdom, a later king, Ahaz, did the same: "He sacrificed and made offerings at the shrines, on the hills, and under every leafy tree." II Kings 16:4. His contemporary, Hoshea, the last king of Israel, followed the same pattern. According to the Bible, these sins led to the deportation of the country's inhabitants to Assyria. II Kings 17:6-10.

In the book of Jeremiah we read that, before leaving for Egypt, the Jews remaining in Judah tell him that their misfortunes derive from not worshipping idols; they also inform him that they intend to re-establish this practice when they reach Egypt:

We will not listen to you in the matter about which you spoke to us in the name of the Lord. On the contrary, we will do everything that we have vowed — to make offerings to the Queen of Heaven and to pour libations to her, as we used to do, we and our fathers, our kings and our officials, in the towns of Judah and the streets of Jerusalem. For then we had plenty to eat, we were well-off, and suffered no misfortune. But ever since we stopped making offerings to the Queen of Heaven and pouring libations to her, we have lacked everything, and we have been consumed by the sword and by famine.

Jeremiah 44:16-18.

48. Halbertal and Margalit, *op. cit.*, p. 8.
49. Quoted in Harvey Shulman, "Bible and Pedagogy in the Teaching of Western Civilization," *Jewish Political Studies Review*, vol. 1, nos. 3 & 4 (Fall 1989):19-20.
50. Lynn White, Jr., "The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis," *Science*, 155 (March 10, 1967):1203-1207.
51. David S. Shapiro, "God, Man and Creation," *Tradition*, vol. 15, nos. 1-2 (Spring-Summer 1975):42.
52. Exodus 3:5.
53. Yehoshua 5:15.
54. Isaiah 11:6-8.
55. This phenomenon is described in more detail in John Naisbitt and Patrician Aburdene, *Megatrends 2000: Ten New Directions for the 1990s* (New York: William Morrow, 1990), ch. 8, "The Age of Biology."
56. Manfred Gerstenfeld, *Environment and Confusion: An Introduction to a Messy Subject* (Jerusalem: Academon, 1994), p. 123ff.
57. Steven S. Schwarzschild, "The Unnatural Jew," *Environmental Ethics*, vol. 6, no. 4 (Winter 1984):347.
58. Adler, *op. cit.*