

Saving our Planet
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I swear this is how the story went and as sure as I'm standing here this is what I believe was the sequence of events. This past summer my wife Missy and I went to Camp. Back to the outdoors, we traveled to the wilds of the Pocono Mountains. We left the comforts of home behind to get back to nature at Camp Ramah. No fine china, no gourmet meals just back to nature we went. I love camp, I love living in a bunk, I love the communal meals and I enjoy swimming in a lake and hiking in the woods. But I am not completely comfortable without the amenities that civilization brings. So I bring with us to camp a fan. I realize there will be no air conditioning for a month but I at least need a fan. So we left the televisions and the treadmills, the DVD players and the cell phones, but we brought a fan.

One day after I was done teaching on a blistering hot day, I went back to my bunk for a nap. It was so hot when I laid down on the bed; I pointed the fan right at me. Not five minutes later Missy returned from teaching her class on Judaism and the environment and she walked into the bunk and turned off the fan. So I said, in the most loving and non-confrontational way, "what are you doing?" Now, I'm not sure what happened next but she did say she didn't see me lying there. However, I'm pretty sure she really said, "You're wasting electricity." Which I wasn't. I was appropriately using electricity. It was really hot. If you want to talk about wasting electricity, talk to my kids who are always leaving lights on when they leave a room. It has gotten so bad in my house that I have started fining them \$1 for every bedroom light I see left on with no one in there. They're the ones who leave the TV on when they walk away. They're the ones who stand in front of the open refrigerator endlessly looking for something to call out to them. Clearly, they're not looking for something to eat, they must just like the cold air blowing on their faces because they don't even appear to be looking for anything - and this from children who continually lecture us about recycling and saving the environment.

I can actually pinpoint the moment when I made the crossover from limitless consumer to environmentalist and it wasn't when I went from using electricity to paying for electricity. I was watching Sesame Street and Ernie was explaining to a real child how turning off the water while you are brushing your teeth can save a gallon of water a day. He explained that leaving the water running while brushing is just a waste and that we need only turn on the water to rinse our toothbrush and that putting forth this small effort could save so much water. Imagine one gallon a day per person in your home per year. Just that little insight could save so much. That is what saving the world is all about. It's not about sweeping governmental reform and about drastic personal sacrifice. It's about seeing the signs and making the necessary changes. When I saw the amount of water used to brush my teeth while I left the water running side by side with the amount of water used to brush my teeth when I only turned on the water to rinse my toothbrush I was amazed. Needless to say, I have been careful ever since. Just seeing the discrepancy between the two made all of the difference. There is nothing as compelling as seeing with our own eyes - and you don't have to be a prophet to see it.

This week we delighted with stories about prophecy and about dream interpretation. We have been raised on stories about Joseph and his extraordinary capabilities to understand the human psyche as well as his ability to predict the future. As much as I fancy those stories and delight in

the musical it has birthed, maybe, just maybe, he didn't do anything so remarkable but just look around and see what is plainly obvious.

We must put this week's dream sequence in line with Pharaoh's dream sequence of next week to realize it took the vision from both Joseph and Pharaoh to save a world. Joseph and Pharaoh both dream of the environment. Joseph and Pharaoh both dream of one force of nature over another. Both dream of an aspect of nature that survives and another that doesn't make it. Both dream, but it is Joseph who wakes with clarity while Pharaoh remains confused - and it is through Joseph that Egypt is saved, not because he was a prophet but because he could clearly see what was obvious to him but obscure to Pharaoh.

You don't need to be a prophet to see it. All we have to do is connect the dots.

Joseph's dream, as he explained it to his brothers, is that one day when they were tying together their sheaf's of grain, suddenly one sheaf stood up and then your sheaf gathered around and bowed down - and then Joseph offers no explanation. Then he had another dream. This time the sun and moon and the stars bowed down to him - and when his brothers pressed him again about what he thought the dreams meant - he did not offer an explanation. Please skip ahead three chapters to where Joseph has been sold into slavery and has found himself in the dungeon of the Pharaoh. There he meets the baker and the cupbearer. Once again, there are dreams of humanity interacting with the environment. The cupbearer dreams of pressing grapes into wine in service to the Pharaoh, and the baker dreams of birds eating the baskets of food above his head. Remarkably, each dream has a consumer and each dream has that which has been consumed. Unbelievably, each dream has a dominant figure and one that is dominated. In fact, in the last three dreams, Joseph already begins to see the pattern unfold. Someone, something is going to be in charge and someone, something, will be manipulated. All three dreams were about control, who has it and how is it used. For Joseph's dream the sun, moon and stars bow down to him. He realizes he has control over the environment and he will ultimately prosper. For the cupbearer, he controls his nature as well, manipulating the grapes into something that brings benefit. The result of this is he survives. Finally, the baker becomes the victim of nature and eventually meets his demise.

Each story delivers the same message with varying results. Each dream speaks of an interaction with nature and a potential for dominance and dominion. However, for Joseph the result is prosperity, for the cupbearer it's survival and for the baker it's extinction. Joseph realizes this but Joseph isn't a prophet, he's just able to put the pieces together.

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Joseph is able to see what others miss and he takes those lessons and simply applies them to Pharaoh's dreams. In next weeks reading, when Pharaoh finds himself unable to understand what is going on around him, unable to understand his dreams or cows consuming other cows, he turns to Joseph. He sees what is happening in Egypt. He sees the wealth and understands that it can't last. Joseph sees the pattern and easily detects the result.

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That is what makes Joseph a great leader. It isn't because he can see the future, but because he makes decisions. We ought to demand that from our leadership as well. We must expect our leaders to see what is coming. We must demand of the people who want to be leaders to talk about what they see coming. We must ask them what the issues are and whom will they surround themselves with to help them see what is coming.

Again I say, *you don't need to be a prophet to see it. All we have to do is connect the dots.*

This summer Missy showed the movie *An Inconvenient Truth* to her students. This is the film for which Al Gore won an Oscar and is part of the reason he won a Nobel Prize. It's the way he finally got to the Oval Office. In that movie, he showed us in real detail and in ways that can't be ignored, the destruction of global warming. The story, as he tells it, is compelling and cannot be ignored. With explicit images and persuasive charts and graphs, he makes an undeniable case that we are destroying our planet. You don't need to be a prophet to see what we're doing to our environment, to our world. I pray that the United Nations sponsored conference on climate change, scheduled to take place this week in Bali, will help world leaders to connect the dots.

Peter Gleick, a MacArthur Fellow and co-founder of the Pacific Institute, one of the nation's leading water-conservation assessment centers and author of the institute's biennial report, *The World's Water*, which surveys global water trends and issues, explains that we can change the way we use our world because we have already done it with water. In the late 1970's and early 1980's there was an energy and environmental crisis. The rivers, lakes and oceans were being polluted. This crisis generated a series of environmental legislation such as the clean water act and the safe drinking water act. We stopped using water the same way. In the 1930's it took 200 tons of water to produce a ton of steel. In the 1980's after the legislation was passed it took 20 tons of water to produce 1 ton of steel. Today in the most efficient plants it takes about 3 tons of water to produce a ton of steel. It happens in industry and it happens in our homes. With new appliances, toilets and showerheads, we're getting smarter about how we use water and we can get smarter about how we use other resources. Do you know that it takes about 3-4 liters of water to produce one liter of bottled water. Producing the plastic simply requires more energy than just turning on our tap. The Pacific Institute estimates that we use the equivalent of 17 million barrels of oil each year just in the production of bottled water.

I know bottled water is convenient and it's a luxury we can afford, but maybe if we take one small step, we can change the world. This week we begin the holiday of *Hanukkah* in which we recall the miracle of the oil. Essentially, this holiday recalls a moment when the oil lasted much longer than it should. We, too, must figure out how to get our resources to last longer - maybe it can happen by turning off one more light. Maybe we can refill the bottle just once and save half of the consumption. One less bottle will have to be recycled. Doing just one thing, refill your water bottle, walk somewhere rather than drive, turn off some lights, lower the temperature in your home by two degrees, all of these are such obvious ideas which can produce real and significant lasting effects on our environment and our world.

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I invite you now to join the Cantor as we prepare for the Musaf Amidah and time for personal & private reflection.