

FJMC Shomrei Ha'Aretz 2017-19 Challenge
Climate Change, Torah, and Our Future: Text, and Tachlis
Rabbi Fred Scherlinder Dobb, Chairman, Coalition on the
Environment and Jewish Life
Presented at F JMC Convention 2017

**Eco-Judaism: Why and
How to Care for Creation**

Jewish Life in our Warming World: Text, Values, and the Reality of Climate Change



IN THE BEGINNING...

בְּרֵאשִׁית

- ...male and female God created them. And God blessed them, and God said to them: "Be fruitful and multiply, fill the Earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, and over every living thing that crawls upon the Earth." (Gen. 1:27-28)
- And God said, "See, I give you every seed-bearing plant that is upon all the Earth, and every tree that has seed-bearing fruit; they shall be yours for food." (Gen. 1:29)
- God took Adam & placed Adam in the Garden of Eden, **לְעֹבְדָהּ** -*l'ovdah* [to work/serve/till it] **וּלְשֹׁמְרָהּ** -*u'l'shomrah* [& to guard/tend it]. (Gen. 2:15)

Gen. 1:28 -- “Fill the Earth and Subdue it,
and have **dominion** / and rule...”

(a) Rashi, yirdu vs yeradu – conditional

(b) In context, see 1:29-30 – it’s limited

(c) Rambam: descriptive, not prescriptive

(d) Dominion over children?! – responsible!

Gen. 2:15 --



WHOSE EARTH IS IT, ANYWAY? – לַה' הָאָרֶץ וּמְלוֹאָהּ

- “The Earth is God's, and the fullness thereof; the settled land, and its inhabitants.” (Psalm 24:1)
[*Contradiction:*] The heavens are God's heavens, but God gave the Earth to humankind. (Ps. 115:16) [*Resolution:*] Humankind is forbidden to enjoy anything without saying a blessing over it...the former verse applies before one pronounces the blessing; the latter verse applies after one pronounces it. (Talmud, Brakhot 35a-b)
- ...if you really listen to my commandments...to love YHVH your God and to serve God with all your heart and all your soul, then...you will eat, and be satisfied. [BUT!] be careful, lest your heart be seduced, and you turn away and serve false gods, and worship them. Then the wrath of YHVH will be upon you; God will stop up the heavens, and there will be no rain, and the Earth will not give its produce; and you will speedily be evicted from the good land that God is giving you..." (Deut. 11:13-17; עֲהֻשׁ#2) *and in other words:*

WHOSE EARTH IS IT, ANYWAY? – לה' הָאָרֶץ וּמְלוֹאָהּ

- “The Earth is God's, and the fullness thereof; the settled land, and its inhabitants.” (Psalm 24:1)



teología de
la liberación
perspectivas

Del SEÑOR es la tierra



BAL TASHCHIT -- DON'T WASTE! -- לֹא-תַשְׁחִית

- When you besiege a city for a long time in order to defeat and capture it, **do not destroy** [*lo tashchit*] **any of its trees**, bringing an axe against it. You may eat from them, but you must not cut them down -- for is the tree in the field human, that it can withdraw into the city before you?! (Deuteronomy 20:19 – *origin of the law of not destroying or wasting*)
- Rav Zutra said: Whoever **covers** an oil lamp, or **uncovers** a naphtha lamp, transgresses the law of *bal tashchit*. (Talmud Shabbat 67b)
- ... Apply [*bal tashchit*] **to your whole life** and to every being which is subordinated to you, from the Earth which bears them all up, to the garment which you have already transformed into your own cover. Yea, **"Do not destroy anything!" is the first and most general call of God.** (R. Samson Raphael Hirsch, 19th century German Orthodox; at Deut. 20:20; Horeb 56)





SHABBAT / SABBATICAL – GREEN JUSTICE & SANITY

- "Sabbath in our time! To cease for a whole day from all business, from all work, in the frenzied hurry-scurry of our time! To close the exchanges, the workshops and factories, to stop all railway services - great heavens! How would it be possible? The pulse of life would stop beating and the world perish!" The world **perish**? On the contrary, it would be **saved**. (S.R. Hirsch, *Judaism Eternal* 2:30)
- To set apart one day a week for freedom...a day on which we stop worshipping the idols of technical civilization, a day on which we use no money, a day of **armistice** in the economic struggle with our [fellows] and the **forces of nature** - is there any institution that holds out a greater hope for [our] progress than the Sabbath? (A.J. Heschel, *The Sabbath*, 1951, 28)
- [The world] has never 'made Shabbos'...It has never paused to say: 'making and doing and learning to control is not the goal'... Every seventh year all debts should be annulled, and the land should stand at rest. It should get to **make Shabbos** just like everybody else, because the earth (*adamah*) was as deeply God-given as *Adam*, its cousin. (Arthur Waskow, 'Rest,' referencing **SHMITA**, the sabbatical Laws from Leviticus 25 & elsewhere)

Shabbat: Limits to Consumerism



Judy Chicago, "Rainbow Shabbat"

got shabbos?



'Tending the Earth Together'

OUR HUMBLE PLACE WITHIN CREATION

- Earth is satisfied by the fruit of Your works ... the trees of God are satisfied; the cedars of Lebanon which God has planted -- there birds make their nests; the house of the stork is in the fir trees. The high hills are for the wild goats; the rocks are a hiding-place for the badgers... (Ps. 104:10-18)
- Even those creatures you deem superfluous in this world -- like flies, fleas, and gnats -- nevertheless have their allotted task in the scheme of Creation. (Exodus Rabbah 10:1)
- Do not believe that all beings exist for the sake of humanity's existence... [rather,] all the other beings too have been intended for their own sakes... (Maimonides, 12th Cent. Egypt; *Guide of the Perplexed* III:13)
- One day Honi [3rd c. sage] was walking on the road, and saw a man planting a carob. Honi said to him, "since it takes 70 years for the carob to bear fruit, is it so clear to you that you will live 70 years and eat from it?!" The man replied, "I came into a world full of carob trees. Just as my ancestors planted for me, so do I plant for my descendants." (Talmud Ta'anit 23a)
- God took Adam and led Adam around all the trees of the Garden of Eden. And God said to Adam: "See My works, how good and praiseworthy they are?! And all that I have created, I made for you. [But,] be mindful then that you do not spoil and destroy My world -- for if you spoil it, there is no one after you to repair it." (Qohelet Rabbah at 7:13)

now, to the key issue:

the

CLIMATE

In 8 Spiritual - Ethical Concepts

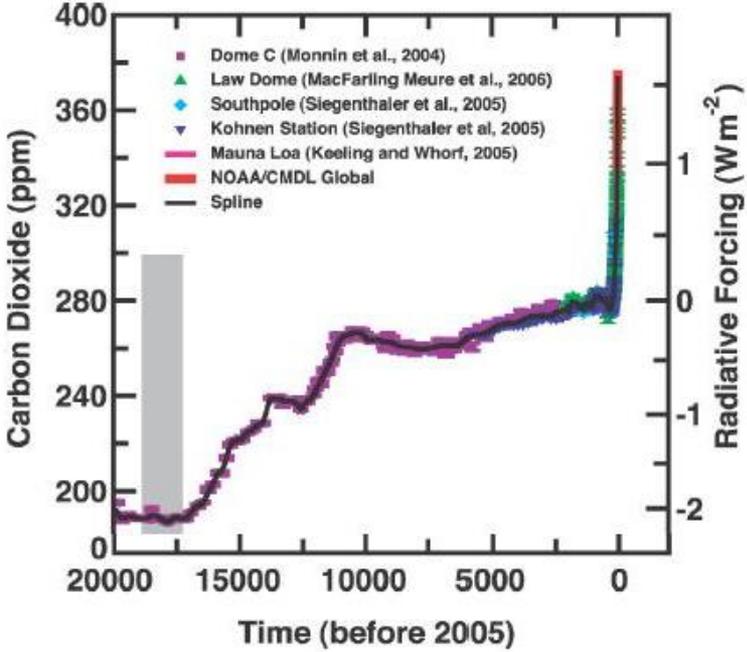
1. Judaism has always recognized that **the stakes are high**, and we can't afford to make lasting mistakes:

"God led Adam around all the trees of the Garden of Eden. And God said to Adam: 'See My works, how good and praiseworthy they are?! And all that I have created, I made for you. [But,] be mindful then that you do not spoil and destroy My world - for if you spoil it, there is no one after you to repair it.'" (Midrash Qohelet Rabbah 7:13; ca. 8th Century)

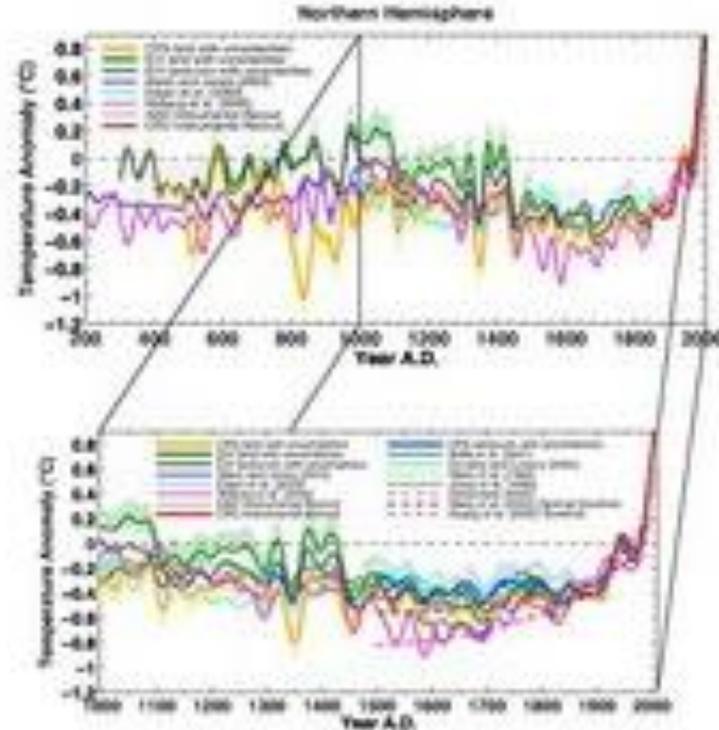
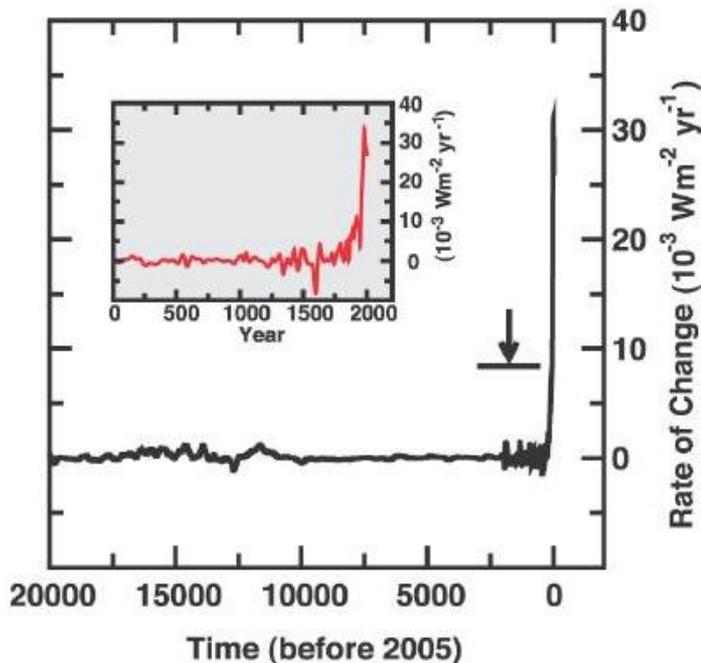
Sobering Science

(Keeling Curve)

(Hockey Stick)



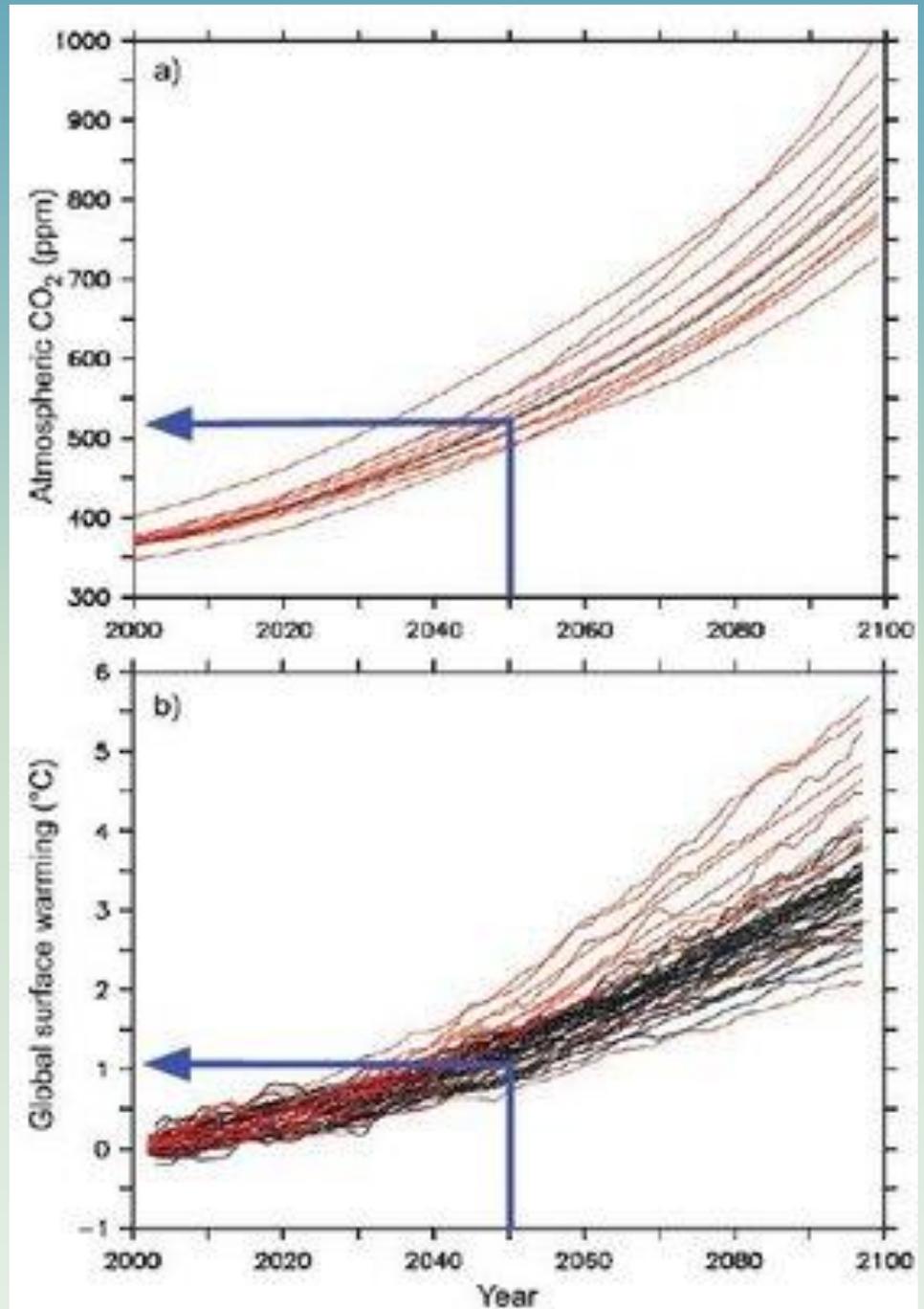
Composite CPS and EIV NH land and land plus ocean temperature reconstructions and estimated 95% confidence intervals

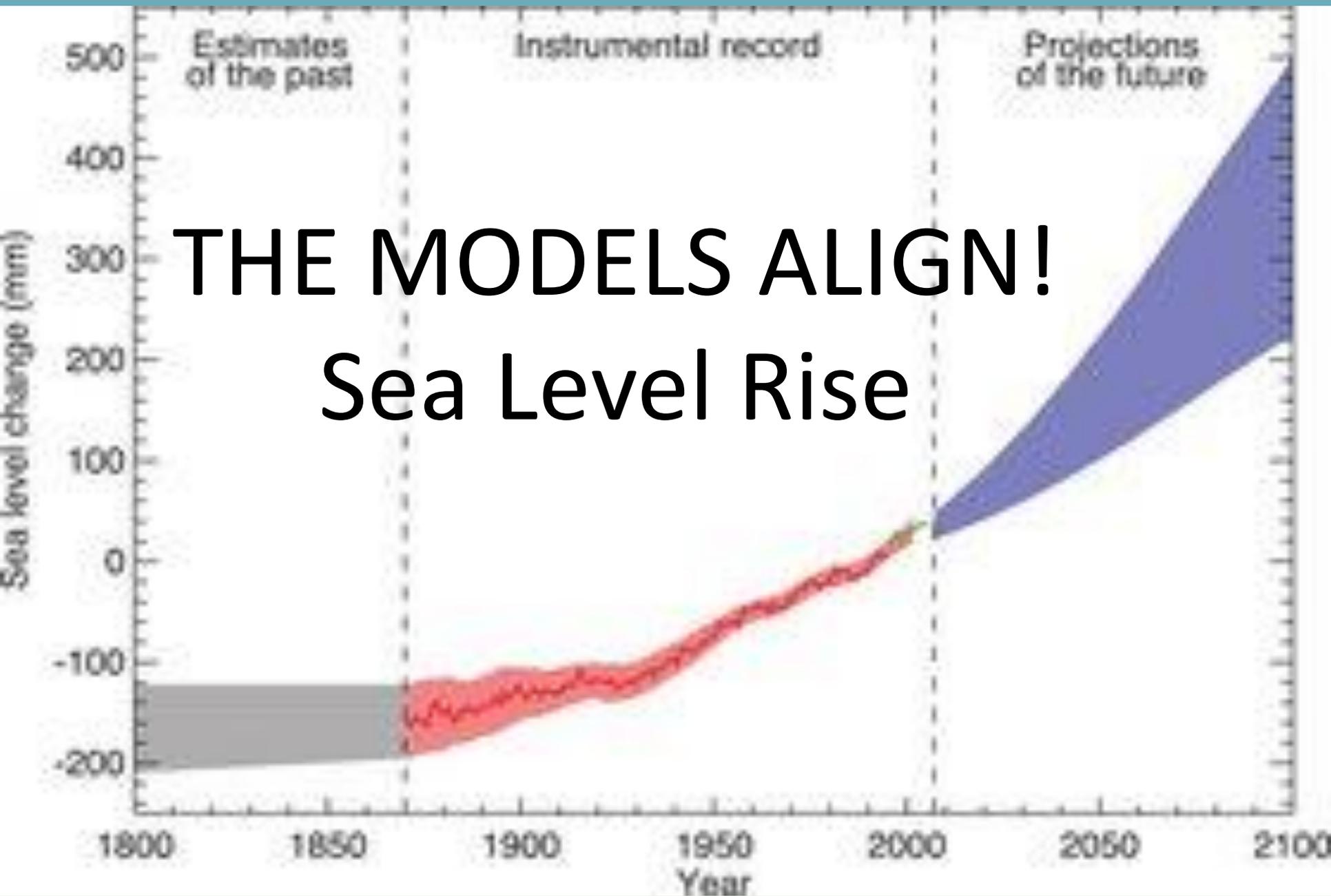


Mann M. E. et al. PNAS 2008;105:13252-13257

THE MODELS ALIGN!

Carbon
Dioxide with
Surface
Warming





THE MODELS ALIGN!
Sea Level Rise

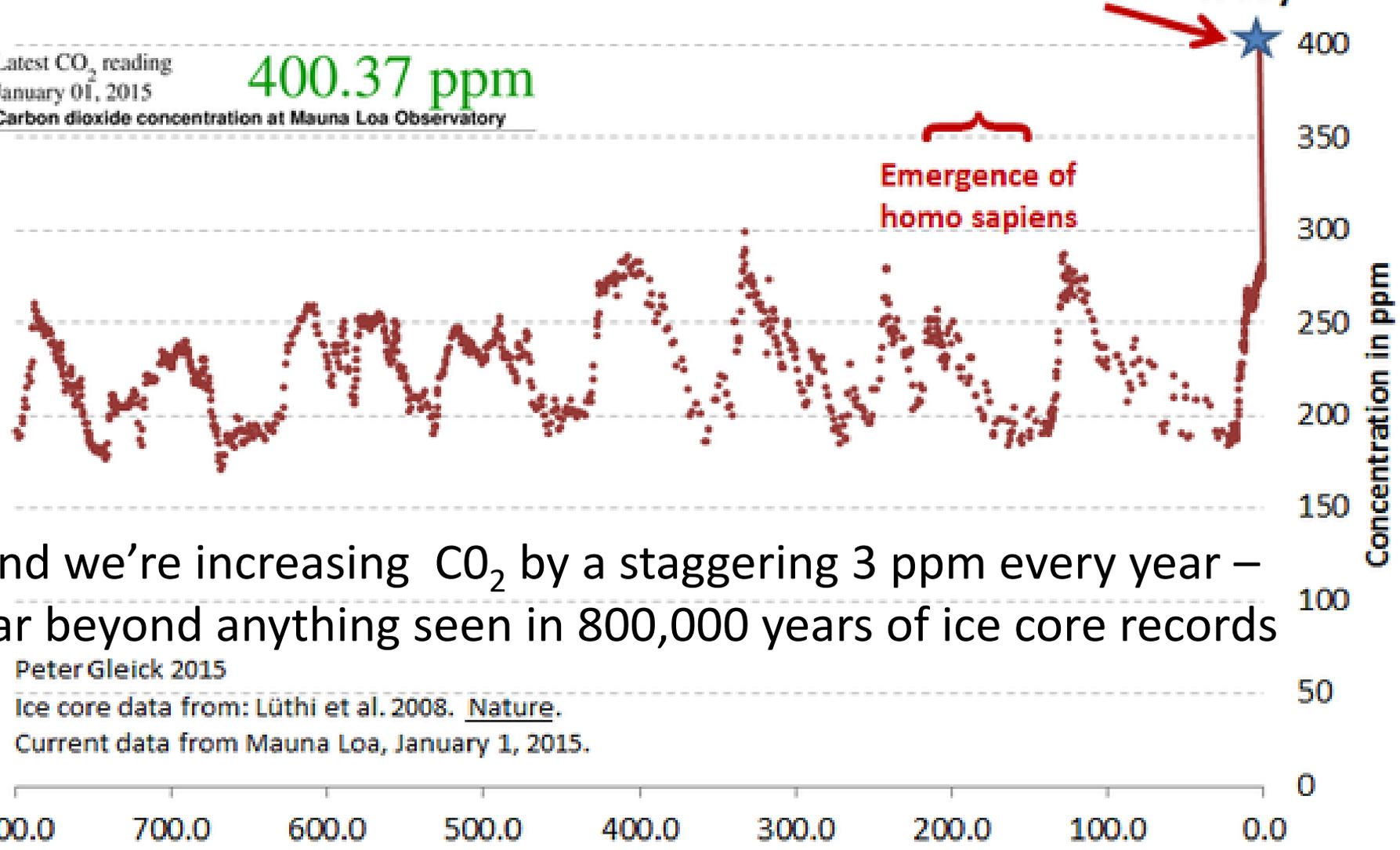
IF YOU SPOIL IT, THERE'S NO ONE AFTER YOU:

Carbon Dioxide in the Atmosphere for the Past 800,000 Years

Latest CO₂ reading
January 01, 2015
Carbon dioxide concentration at Mauna Loa Observatory

400.37 ppm

Where we are today



And we're increasing CO₂ by a staggering 3 ppm every year – Far beyond anything seen in 800,000 years of ice core records

Peter Gleick 2015

Ice core data from: Lüthi et al. 2008. [Nature](#).

Current data from Mauna Loa, January 1, 2015.



There Is No Planet B

Protect Our Home!

לְעֵבֶדָה וּלְשִׁמְרָה

2. Remember **whose Earth** we're on in the first place, and what we're supposed to be doing with it:

- "The Earth is God's, and the fullness thereof; the settled land, and its inhabitants." (Ps 24:1)
 - **"The land shall not be sold beyond reclaim; for the land is Mine; you are strangers and sojourners with Me."** (Lev. 25:23)
- "God placed the human in the Garden of Eden, *l'ovdah* (to serve/till) *u'l'shomrah* (and to guard/tend) it." (Gen. 2:15)

Needed:

HUMILITY!

(as individuals, and a species)

(Moshe ish *anav* me'od...)

3. Conservation: Wasting anything is a shame (especially when it's so easy to use less electricity, get better mileage, etc...)

- *Bal Tashchit:* "When you besiege a city... do not destroy (*lo tashchit*) any of its trees ... you may eat of them, but not cut them down..." (Deuteronomy 20:19)
- Rav Zutra said: "Whoever covers an oil lamp, or uncovers a naphtha lamp, transgresses the law of *bal tashchit*." (Talmud Bavli, Shabbat 67b). [These actions make fuel burn inefficiently; think energy conservation & emissions standards!]

3. Conservation

"Righteous people ... do not waste in this world **even a mustard seed**. They become sorrowful with every wasteful and destructive act that they see, and if they can, they use all their strength to save everything possible from destruction. But the wicked are not thus; they rejoice in the destruction of the world, just as they destroy themselves."

(Sefer HaChinuch 529; 13th Century)

3. Conservation

Righteous people ... do not waste in this world
even a mustard seed. (Sefer HaChinuch 529)

(also Matthew, Luke, et al)



versus:



4. Justice / Equality: We in the US are under 5% of the world's population, yet cause at least ¼ of all greenhouse gases. And who will rising sea levels and other effects of climate change harm most? Poor people in developing nations....

"Tzedek tzedek tirdof
-- Justice, justice, you shall
pursue, in order that you
may live... "

(Deuteronomy 16:20)

4. Justice / Equality

- "God loves righteousness and justice; the Earth is full of God's loving-kindness." (Ps 33:5)
- "Do not stand idly by the blood of your neighbor ... Love your neighbor as yourself." (Leviticus 19:16, 19:18)

Environmental Justice: A Religious Natural (Noah should've thought about it!)



No more flood? The fire next time?



Bangladesh



Fiji



India



New Orleans

Did you know?

262 million people were affected by climate disasters in 2004, more than 98 per cent of them in developing countries



Humanity 2.0, inter-faith, is another implication of Leviticus 19...



5. Preserving Life: Climate change means the spread of new diseases, longer heat waves, more intense hurricanes, worsening agricultural losses, and the social instability that accompanies these trends.

- "One is forbidden from gaining a livelihood at the expense of another's health."
(R Isaac b. Sheshet, Responsum 196, 14th Century)
- "Shabbat, like all the *mitzvot* / commandments, is pushed aside by danger to human life." (Rambam, 1165, MT Zmanim 2:1)

6. Saving Endangered Species:

Everything's part of the plan – yet global warming moves too fast (*hundreds* of times faster than ‘natural’ change) for most of Creation to adapt, threatening many species, and whole ecosystems.

- "Even those creatures you deem superfluous in the world – like flies, fleas, and gnats -- nevertheless have their allotted task in the scheme of Creation (*seder beresheet*)."
(Midrash Exodus Rabbah 10:1)
- "It should not be believed that all beings exist for the sake of humanity's existence ... [rather,] all the other beings, too, have been intended for their own sakes..."
(Rambam / Maimonides, *Guide for Perplexed* III:13; 1190, Egypt)

THE FIRST *BRIT* / COVENANT IS WITH ALL OF CREATION !

The Noah story is one big ecological parable

WHY we conserve, why we care...



(Gen. 9:2)

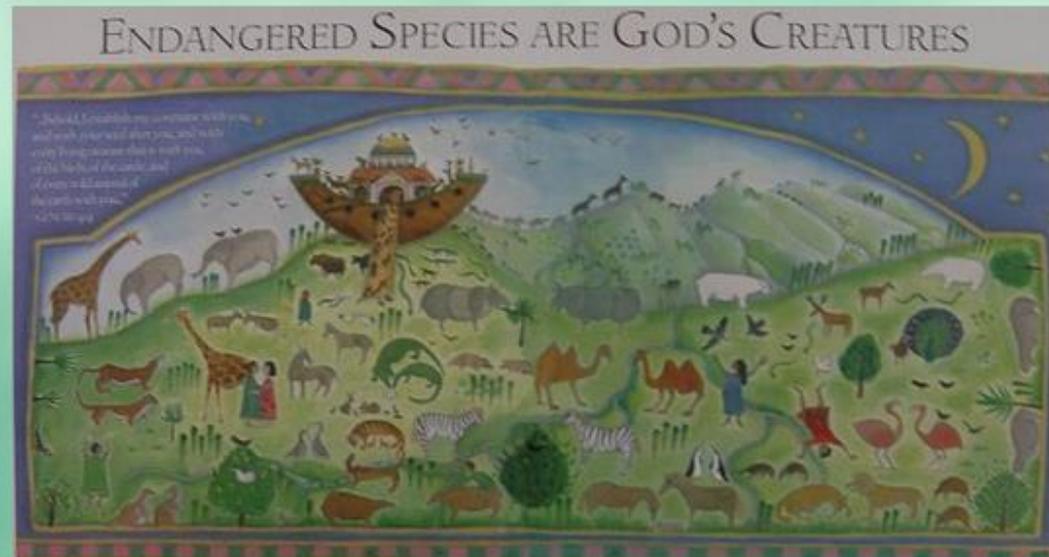
Noah was the first endangered species Activist!

PROJECT NOAH

- Noah Trivia 1: Mrs. Noah's name?
- Noah Trivia 2: how long did it rain?
- Noah Trivia 3: how many of each animal?
- Noah Trivia 4: What bird did he send?

הַנְּנִי מְקִיִּים אֶת-בְּרִיתִי אִתְּכֶם,
וְאֶת-זִרְעֵכֶם, אַחֲרֵיכֶם

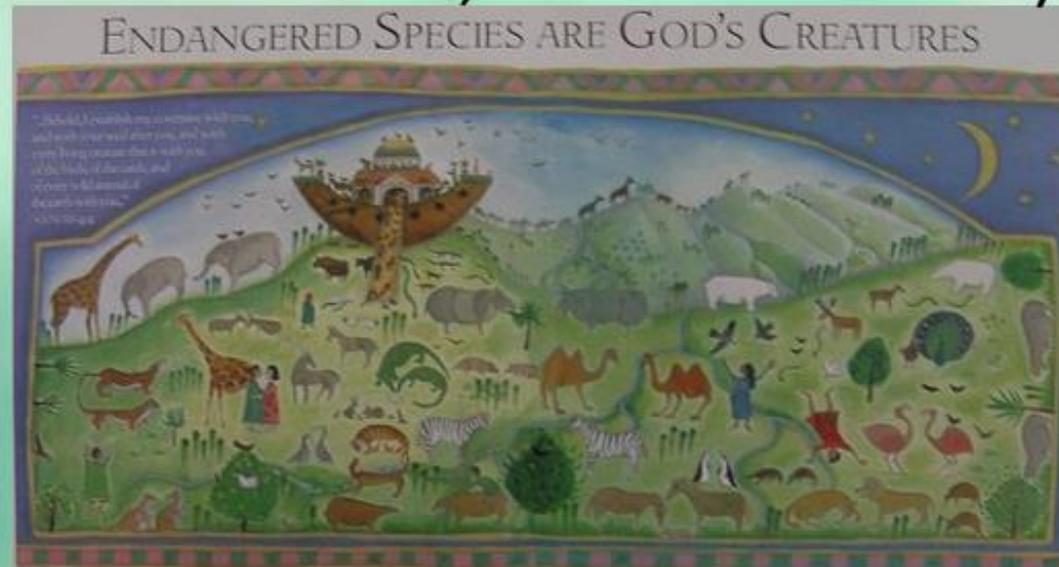
וְאֵת כָּל-נֶפֶשׁ הַחַיָּה אֲשֶׁר
אִתְּכֶם, בְּעוֹף בְּבִהֵמָה וּבְכָל-חַיַּת
הָאָרֶץ אִתְּכֶם; מִכָּל יִצְאֵי הַתֵּבָה,
לְכָל חַיַּת הָאָרֶץ.



PROJECT NOAH

The raven said to Noah, "great is your hatred for me! ... you withhold [scouts] from species of which there are seven, but send [me] from a species of which there are two! If the power of heat or cold overwhelms me, would not the world be lacking a species?"

(-- Babylonian Talmud, Sanhedrin 108b)



Everything for Its Own Sake

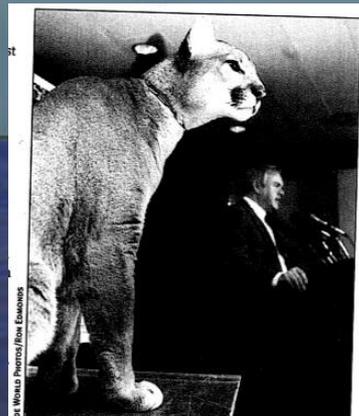
Biodiversity is a core value derived from Noah's Ark, seen across tradition -- from Rambam saying that creation isn't just "for" humans, to Psalm 104:

"the Earth is satisfied by the fruit of Your works ... the trees of God are satisfied; the cedars of Lebanon, which God has planted -- there birds make their nests; the house of the stork is in the fir trees. **The high hills are for the wild goats; the rocks are a hiding-place for the badgers...**"

Another Operation Noah?

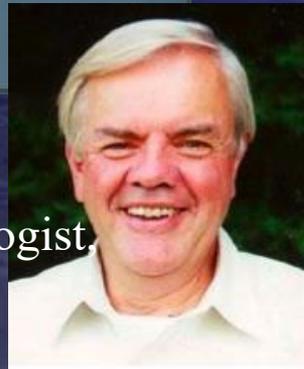
Endangered Species
Act (reauth., 1995-96)

We can do it
again...



© 1995 M. J. Powell / Ron Edwards

Evangelical Biologist,
Dr. Cal Dewitt



7. The Precautionary Principle: Even if (despite *near unanimity* among peer-reviewed scientists) we accept “debate” re: climate change, Judaism teaches us to take serious precautionary measures, even before all the data are amassed:

- "When you build a new house, you shall make a parapet for your roof, so that you do not bring bloodguilt on your house if anyone should fall from it." (Deut. 22:8)

- "Similarly with all potentially dangerous objects – remove them far from yourselves and from the way of the community." (Maimonides, MT Hilchot De'ot, 12th Cent.)

This you call a parapet?!



This you call a **parapet**?!



This you call a parapet?!



7. Precautionary Principle

- "A sick person in danger - we attend to all their needs on Shabbat, at the advice of skilled local healer. If there is a doubt whether or not we need to violate the Shabbat for them - or if one doctor says to, ... but another doctor says there's no need - we violate the Shabbat for them, since [even] doubtful danger to human life pushes aside the Shabbat." (Rambam, MT Zmanim 2:1, continuing the quote above at #5. What if we replace "doctor" with "scientist," and "Shabbat" with "corporate profits"?!)
- "... We don't need an expert [to save a life by violating other laws like Shabbat], since ... [even] doubtful danger to human life [makes the law] lenient. And it's forbidden to delay the thing [treatment]... "
(Tur, 14thC Spain, OH 328 - to which Caro adds, "the one who rushes to do so, look, this is praiseworthy! But the one who [stops to] ask, look, **this is a murderer.**")

7. Precautionary Principle



7. Precautionary Principle

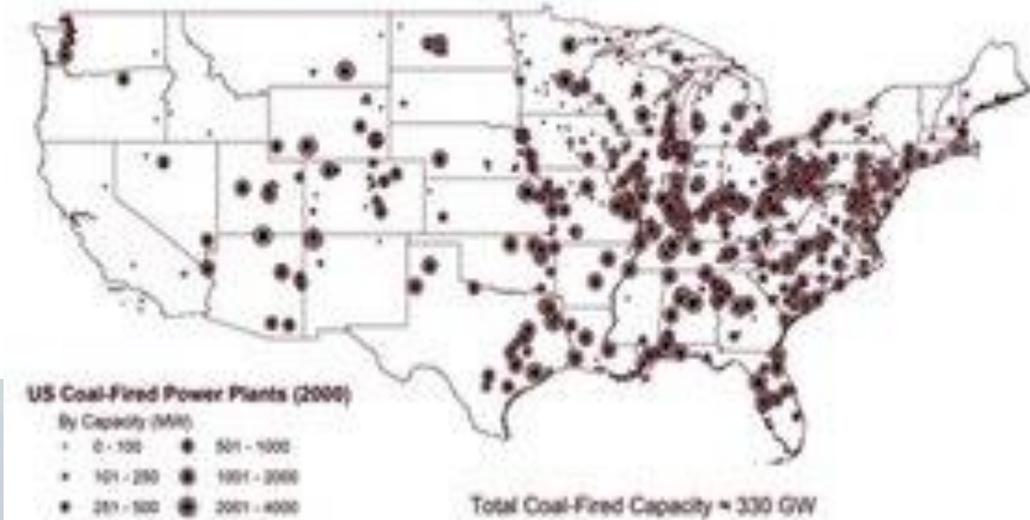
"A burning coal /object, that's left in a place where the public can be injured by it -- one is *allowed to extinguish it* [even on Shabbat], whether it's of metal or of wood."

(Yosef Caro in *Shulchan Aruch*, Oreh Hayim 334:27;
16th Century Tzfat)

Ison Rock Ridge Wise Co, VA -- Mountaintop Removal Mining



Figure 3.1 Distribution of U. S. Coal-Based Power Plants. Data from 2002 USEPA eGRID database; Size Of Circles Indicate Power Plant Capacity.



Remember
Psalm 104?! –
“The high
mountains are
for wild goats;
the rocky
cliffs, a refuge
for badgers...”

Ison Rock Ridge Wise Co, VA -- Mountaintop Removal Mining

Figure 3.1 Distribution of U. S. Coal-Based Power Plants. Data from 2002 USEPA eGRID database; Size Of Circles Indicate Power Plant Capacity.



We care for Creation.

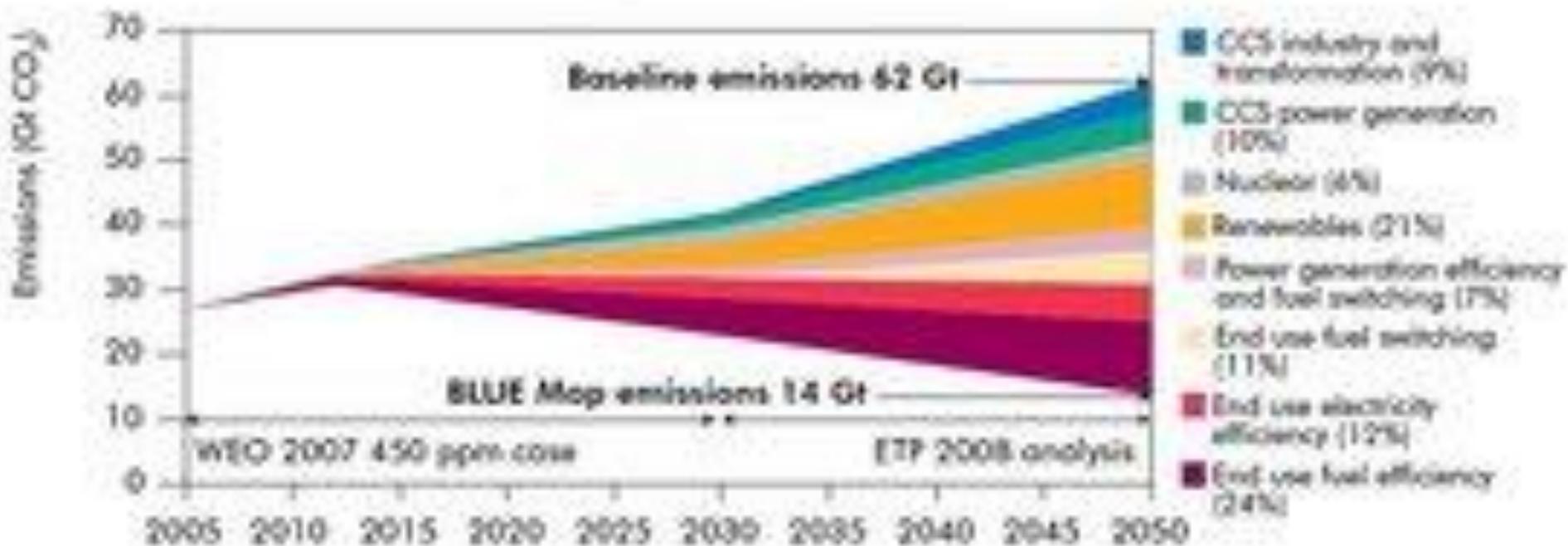
Please remember to
TURN OFF
this light.



GREATER WASHINGTON
INTERFAITH
& *Power*
& *Light*

www.gwIPL.org

Figure ES.2 Comparison of the World Energy Outlook 2007 450 ppm case and the BLUE Map scenario, 2005-2050



**LO ALECHA HA'M'LACHA LIGMOR – V'LO
ATA BEN HORIN L'HIBATEL MIMENAH!**

**It's not up to you to finish the job – but
neither are you free to desist from it!**

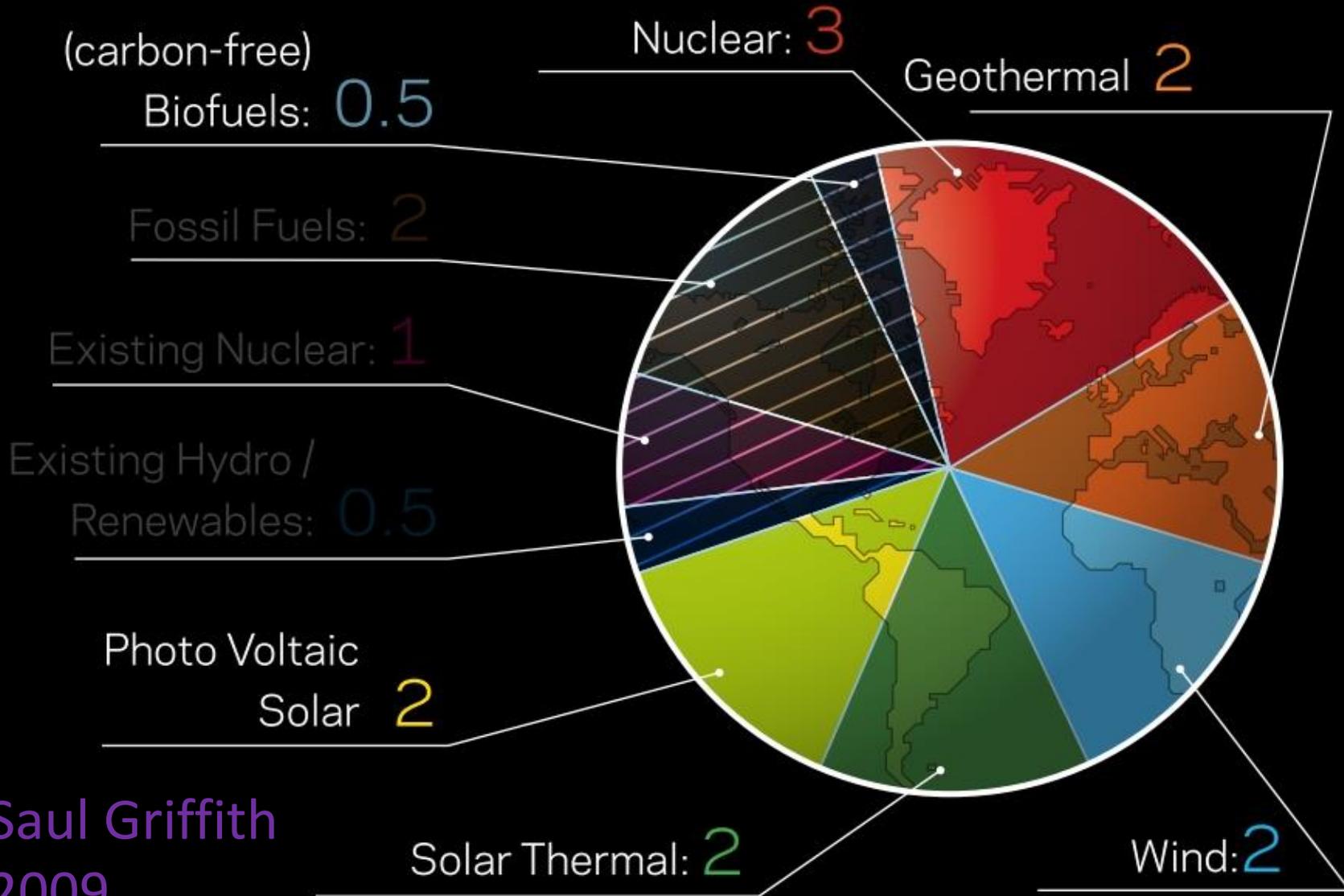
***The work is huge. The time is now.
The responsibility is ours.***

2033 Energy Mix

Units shown in Terawatts (TW)

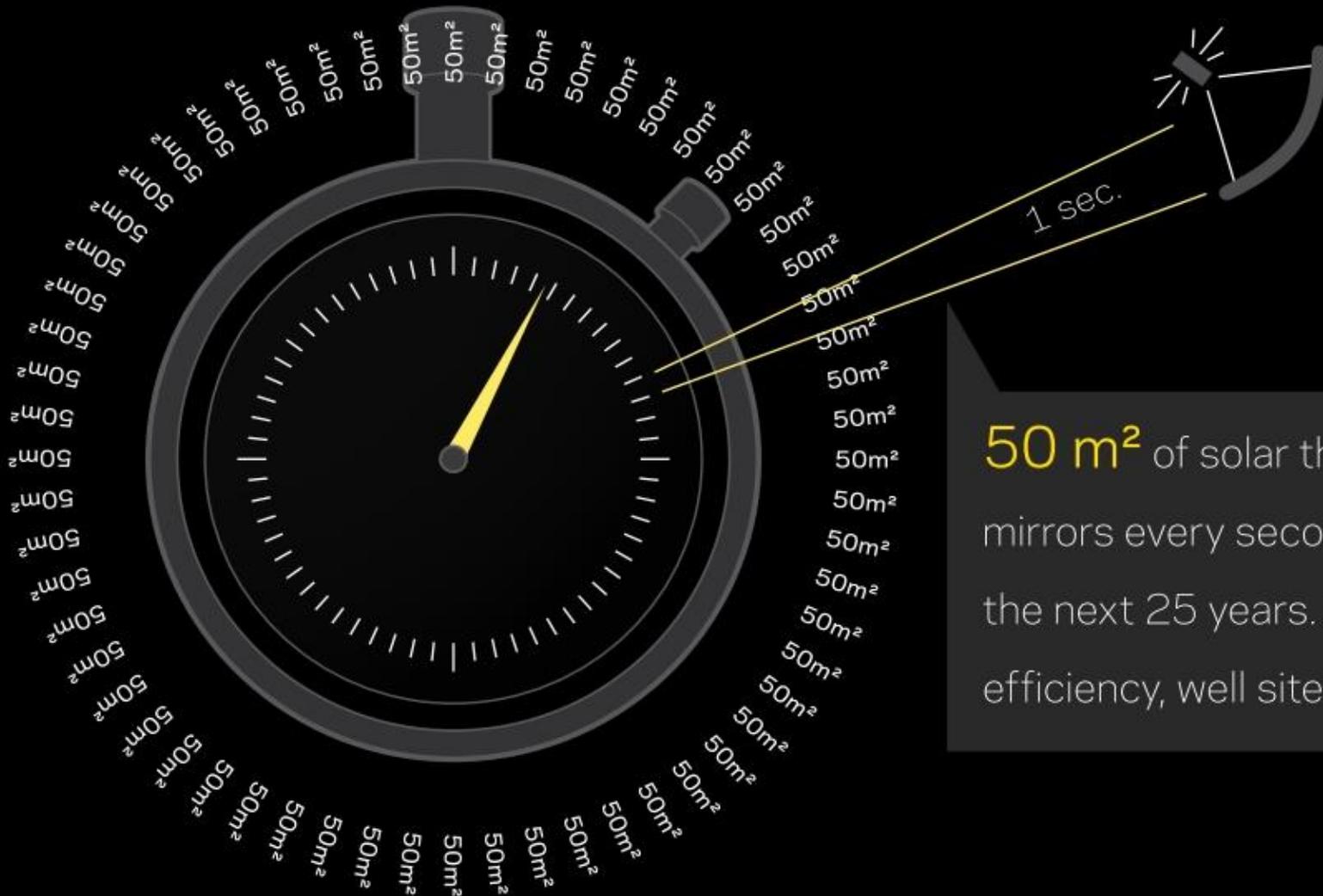
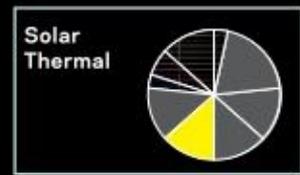
Needed just to stay at 450 ppm:

15 TW



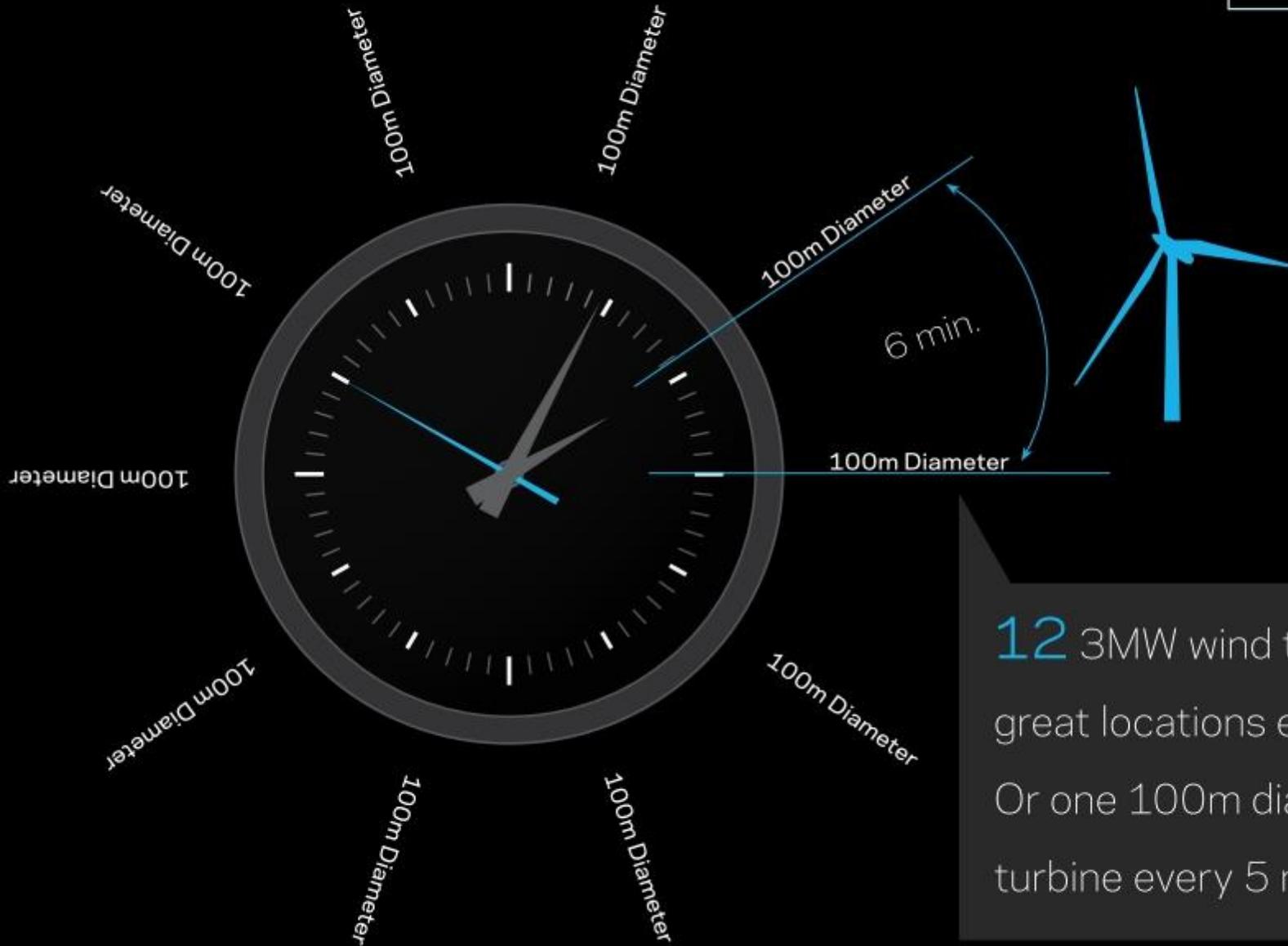
Saul Griffith
2009

2 TW New Solar Thermal



50 m² of solar thermal mirrors every second for the next 25 years. 30% efficiency, well sited.

2 TW New Wind



12 3MW wind turbines in great locations every hour. Or one 100m diameter turbine every 5 minutes...

David Roberts, on Saul Griffith's research (the previous slides):

That's **a lot** of stuff to build! ... 'the equivalent of America's massive industrial build-up for WWII, only **across the entire globe**, for **40 years straight** (at least), against a faceless enemy.'

Of course we have no idea what the actual mix will end up being. There's no predicting innovation, much less politics. But the one thing we do know is that the task ahead is **enormous**, so **gobsmackingly big** that the smart money is almost certainly on failure. If we want a chance at success we're going to have to **rethink a lot of our assumptions** -- about consumption, economic analysis, policy design, and political strategy.

[http://grist.org](http://grist.org/renewable-energy/2011-02-11-gobsmackingly-gargantuan-challenge-of-shifting-to-clean-energy)

THUS IT BEARS REPEATING:

*Lo alecha ha'm'lakha ligmor, v'lo
ata ben khorin l'hibatel mimenah*

– It's not upon you to
finish the task; but neither
are you free to *desist* from
it. (R. Tarfon)

(Mishnah
Avot 2:15)

לא עליך המלאכה לגמור

ולא אתה בן חורין

להבטל ממנה

8. **Concluding on Climate:** "See, I have set before you this day life and death, blessing and curse –

ובחרת בחיים

and [you should] **choose life**, so that you *and your children* may live." (Deuteronomy 30:19)



Compiled by Rabbi Fred Scherlinder Dobb

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Contact **COEJL** for more info:

www.coejl.org (Coalition on the Environment and
Jewish Life)



Presented By; Federation of Jewish Men's Clubs
www.FJMC.org/content

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