

Articles

How Faith Communities Are Helping to Save the Planet Part 2: God Is Green: Finding Environmental Values in Religious Tradition

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Daron Joffe gingerly removed a pair of bowing sunflowers from a vase, wraps them in green tissue paper and hands them to a mother of two. He explained to her teenage son where the edible seeds will come from.

Every Friday, Farmer D stocks his truck with produce and drives to the Marcus Jewish Community Center in Dunwoody from his 100-acre organic farm in Athens. He sells his fruits, vegetables and flowers, and he distributes a newsletter complete with featured recipes and narratives about the week's harvest. "They get to eat the whole season's food, and share in the stories of their food," says Joffe, over the din of screaming youth groups at the Marcus JCC.

Joffe directs the Gan-Chaim, or Garden of Life, program, which "provides educational and therapeutic gardening experiences for youth, adults, seniors and people with special needs at Jewish Community Centers, youth camps, and schools." In his farming sessions, Joffe recalls the intersection of farming cycles and Jewish holidays, which he believes to have been largely forgotten. The 26-year-old native of South Africa has stretched his \$30,000 Joshua Venture grant to fund Gan-Chaim as well as marketing and development for his organic farm, Full Moon Cooperative. Full Moon offers a wildly successful Community Supported Agriculture program in which community members pay a seasonal fee and receive edible dividends at a rate of about one dollar per pound of organic produce.

Joffe is the Atlanta representative for the Coalition on the Environment and Jewish Life (COEJL), a North American conglomeration of Jewish groups and environmentalists that provides environmental education, scholarship, advocacy and action. COEJL, born in 1993, is just one of many new faith-based organizations with a focus on environmental justice. Indeed COEJL joins the U.S. Catholic Conference, the National Council of Churches of Christ, and the Evangelical Environmental Network to form the National Religious Partnership for the Environment (NRPE).