

## **HOW WILL GLOBAL WARMING AFFECT LIFE ON EARTH?**

Adapted from a program developed by Shantilal Bhagat and David Radcliff for the interfaith climate change campaigns

*The Earth is the Lord's and all that is in it, the world, and those who live in it. (Ps. 24:1)*

### **Session goal:**

Encourage youth to develop care for the environment within a Jewish framework, and to introduce students to the threats of climate change.

### **Introduction:**

Climate is the average weather of a given area over an extended period of time. A stable climate is needed for societies and economies. Global climate change refers to potentially serious threats posed by climate instability due to human activity. Today few scientists doubt the atmosphere is warming. Most also agree that the rate of heating is accelerating and that the consequences of this change could become increasingly disruptive.

### **Focus (10-12 minutes):**

Invite each person to tell about either the hottest place s/he's ever been (or the hottest s/he's ever been) or the coldest place s/he's ever been (or the coldest s/he's ever been). If visiting or moving to a very hot area, how does a person adapt to the change in temperature? (Possible responses include: wearing lighter clothing, turning on the air conditioner, staying in the shade, going to a swimming pool...and of course, most of the time a person has the choice to leave the area if it is too warm.)

Imagine if you are suddenly became 10 degrees warmer the year round. How would people adapt to this change? Now think about other parts of your local environment – trees, other plants, streams, animals – how would they deal with a sudden year-round increase in temperature of 10 degrees? Think about an area 1000 miles south of where you live now (the area where today it may be on average 10 degrees warmer than the place you live). Do the plants and animals now living in your area live there? What would become of the animals in your area if the temperature would rise by 10 degrees year-round? What about trees and other plants? Do they adapt as quickly to temperature changes as humans do?

### **Connect (25 minutes):**

Show the video *God's Creation and Global Warming* (15 minutes, available from COEJL for \$5.00). Use it as background for the discussion that follows.

### **Impacts**

Scientists predict that the average temperature of the earth could warm by as much as 10 degrees in the next century. Apart from the possible dislocation or disappearance of plant and animal species, what are other possible consequences of this degree of warming? (Possible responses include: oceans will warm, glaciers will melt, causing sea levels to rise

and salt water to inundate settlements along many low-lying coasts, the regions suitable for farming will shift, new forms of disease, such as the introduction of malaria-carrying mosquitoes; less rainfall and different general weather patterns; higher costs for air conditioning; more heat-related deaths.)

### **Causes**

The accepted cause of global warming is the release of CO<sub>2</sub> from the burning of fossil fuels such as coal and petroleum products. What activities or enterprises in your community depend on energy from fossil fuel? (Possible responses include: driving automobiles, shipping food, running factories, heating and cooling homes, heating water, general consumption of manufactured products, mowing lawns, using paper [paper production is the 2<sup>nd</sup> leading commercial consumer of energy in the US], washing and drying clothes.)

If the US wanted to do its part to curb global warming, we would have to burn approximately half as much fossil fuel as we do today. **Very quickly brainstorm a list of steps people could take toward a goal like this. Stress that there are no right or wrong answers. No discussion at this point.**

Do you think people generally are aware of the threat of global warming? How many people do you know who have made a choice of some kind that limits their personal consumption of fossil fuels? If a person wanted to use his/her car less, for instance, what could s/he do differently? Would it be easy or hard to drive one's car half as much? Are there other convenient and safe ways to get around in your community? If not, what could be done about this? How would the community respond if there were a severe fuel shortage due to a war or an embargo – what would the community do and how would people adapt their transportation practices?

Many people don't seem to take responsibility for slowing global warming. Why do you think this is so? In what ways does our society encourage or discourage us to think about things like resource consumption and energy use? Do we, as Jews, have any more reason than people in general to be concerned about global warming and to try to do something about it? Why/why not?

### **Apply (5-8 minutes):**

How many of you agree with these statements? Raise 2 hands to strongly agree, 1 hand to mostly agree, no hands if you disagree. Ask some of the group to comment on their votes as you go along.

The biblical quote given at the beginning of the session.

The earth belongs to people to treat as they choose.

Humans will use technology to find a way to deal with global warming before it really causes any harm.

If people just had more information about how their choices affect global warming, they would choose differently.

People are basically short-sighted and don't really think about or care about what harm their actions may cause in the future.

Even if the earth gets warmer by 10 degrees, it won't really be that bad – people will find a way to adjust.

Youth have a greater awareness of the need to care for the earth than older people.

Most youth aren't really doing much to live more responsibly toward the earth – we're just wasteful consumers like everyone else.

The way we relate to the rest of creation is fine, and how God intended it to be.

If God were to give us an 11<sup>th</sup> commandment on the subject of relating to the earth, what would it say?