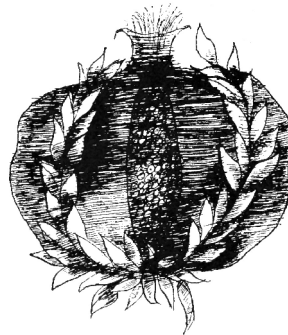



Environmental Engagement in Orthodox Day Schools: Suggested Educational Strategies

Submitted by
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I. Introduction:

Canfei Nesharim is an established organization dedicated to addressing concerns and educating observant Jews about Environmental Sustainability and Protection, specifically in the Orthodox Jewish community and its various institutions in the United States. In working within the parameters of that mission and after achieving early success in congregational and organizational settings, Canfei Nesharim applied for and was awarded a *Covenant Foundation Ignition Grant* to explore the interest and possibilities for such programming in our Orthodox Jewish Day School communities. This grant was awarded for the fiscal year of 2008. Dr. Saundra Sterling Epstein was hired as the Educational Consultant who would work with the organization's Executive Director, Evonne Marzouk, in designing and implementing the plan for exploring such interest. Three focus group meetings would be held in different communities with the stated goal of collecting information regarding what Environmental Education programs are presently in some of our schools, what resources are available, and what needs there are that could be met, thus informing a potential agenda for Canfei Nesharim in addressing the needs and realities of these organizations.

II. Environmental Engagement in Orthodox Day Schools:

The plan was to hold three focus groups in three representative communities that would involve about three to five schools each. These focus groups would provide an opportunity for educators from schools in a given community to come together and share what is going on in their schools specifically and to state their needs as well as any roadblocks that exist in their communities, and indicate what additional resources would be valuable in furthering their programs of Environmental Education in a Torah based environment. Further, it was decided to focus primarily on educators involved with late elementary grades as well as early middle school populations for the purposes of this study, though there are representative voices from younger grades and high school grades as well.

Ultimately, after several discussions and examination of the resources and support systems available in different communities, it was determined that the three communities that would be used were as follows:

- Greater Washington Area
- Greater New York Area
- Greater Boston Area

For lists of participants in each of these focus groups, see **Appendix A**.

Each of these groups were brought together on the indicated date and discussions were held that were intended to elicit the information needed regarding programs that exist, programs that are needed and roadblocks that might stand in the way of such programming.

For copies of the scripts and questionnaires used in these meetings, see

- **Appendix B** for Greater Washington Area's Focus Group;
- **Appendix C** for Greater New York Area and Greater Boston Area Focus Groups

Note should be taken that each of the formats used reflect the input of several people associated with Canfei Nesharim and others in the larger Day School community, as well as the experience of earlier focus groups as the study evolved.

Further, thanks go to

- All members of the Focus Groups, as listed in **Appendix A**;
- Avi West and the staff of the Partnership for Jewish Living and Learning for all of his help and co-sponsorship of this effort in the Greater Washington area;
- Rabbi Ellis Bloch and the staff of the Greater New York Board of Jewish Education for all of his help and co-sponsorship of this effort in the Greater New York area; and
- Dr. Danny Margolis and the staff of the Greater Boston Bureau of Jewish Education for all of his help and co-sponsorship of this effort in the Greater Boston area.

Additional note should be taken of a phone conference held on Tuesday, January 6, 2009 from 11:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m., that included the following participants along with Evonne Marzouk and Sunnie Epstein:

- Lori Bellet, Oakland Hebrew Day School
- Abby Weiner, Jewish Day School of Lehigh Valley
- Rabbi Elchanan Weinbach, Shalhevet Day School, Los Angeles

This conference was held as a result of interest received from these communities, in addition to Springfield, Massachusetts, who could not meet with us at this time regarding this work. It was decided to conduct this fourth meeting to include as many voices as possible in this process, both staying within the confines of the original planned program for 2008 and responding to additional interest shown. The format used was to begin with the same questions indicated in the previous meetings and just listen to the interaction amongst the participants.

Although we are focusing on the results of the three formal meetings of focus groups as the main source of input in this report, there are points where the feedback of this fourth group is included as well.

III. Compilation of the Findings:

For purposes of this report, we will use the script from the New York and Boston area focus groups as a means of collation of the information gleaned. The three guiding questions that were used in all focus group meetings were as follows:

- **What is going on now in your school regarding Environmental Educational programming?**
- **What are the challenges and barriers in your school? What gets in the way of teaching about the Environment in your school?**
- **What resources do we have and are needed; where do we go from here?**

Findings are reported in a composite manner, except where it is relevant to indicate in which community a specific program or challenge occurred. Obviously, some of the resources, especially some institutions and programs, that are listed are specific to indicated areas.

Before indicating the actual findings and information gleaned from the Focus Group meetings, a few general words regarding trends found in these meetings and the communities they represent are in order.

1. The group in the Greater Washington area reported being confronted by the most roadblocks to this type of programming on many levels and this dominated much of the discussion, more so than for the other two groups. Here there was an explicit fear that “Environmentalism” is too liberal a cause for many parents and community members to embrace. On the other hand, in the Greater New York area, as one of educators present indicated when it was clear that this was not a major topic of concern, “Simply there is no pushback here.” Certainly, this may have been due to the self-selection of the schools that chose to attend this meeting, which were mostly in the Modern Orthodox range. In the Greater Boston area, there was an observation on the part of several focus group members that there is an interesting mix of an academically powerful community among whom there are some voices who are somewhat right wing in their political orientation in Boston proper while in Sharon, the community often tends to be more to the left. These orientations presented in the form of some notable variations in each of the meetings and perceptions shared about the communities in which the groups met.

2. In all groups there was, to varying degrees, a shared sense that while educating the student population about these concerns is valuable, we should take care not to place too many demands on the parent population to change their own lives and practices regarding how we interact with the environment and its elements. Simultaneously, there was also the expressed sentiment that exploring practices at home could be acceptable in the form of homework assignments and a recognition of the opportunity of reaching adults through the children in our communities.

3. The focus groups themselves were seen as valuable, with participants indicating that it was important to hear and share what other schools are doing, to know that schools have similar roadblocks with which they must contend, and just to be more aware of readily available programming in one’s own community setting. One prominent result of these meetings was that all of the schools that participated expressed interest in continuing to work with Canfei Nesharim to develop and implement materials on this topic in the coming year as well as for a more extended period of time. In some cases, such as the phone conference and the Greater New York Area group, it was clear that participants took information from other schools and intended to try to stay in contact with each other and wanted the support of Canfei Nesharim in this endeavor.

Composite Findings from the Focus Group Meetings:

A. What is going on now in your school regarding Environmental Educational programming?

Regarding programming that is presently occurring, the following types of programs and experiences were identified as being used in at least one of the schools with representatives in attendance:

Organizational structures utilized:

- Teaching units on a variety of topics that are relevant in Science, including but not limited to biomes, oceans and ocean life, rainforests, endangered species, animal life, vegetation, bio-fuels, wind power, etc. (Several schools reported having a year in the Science program dedicated to Earth Science or some aspect that lends itself to this study and exploration.)
- Use of Environmental Education based aspects and themes as a year long focus in a school program
- Presence of thematic foci for each year into which Environmental Education programs could be placed, e.g. one school indicated that for each of three years of Middle School the Halachic/educational focus is Mitzvot bein Adam LaMakom, Mitzvot bein Adam LeChavero, and Mitzvot bein Adam LeAtzmo
- Integrated Torah/Science curriculum

- School wide Hagim programming as well as use of other thematic rubrics for integration of environmental concerns in school program and learning
- Torah/Science fairs
- Hugin/Clubs that are dedicated to Environmental issues
- Community Service days including environmentally related tasks and involvements
- Connection with communities that are facing environmental challenges, such as the aftermath of hurricanes
- Consciousness raising regarding our own use of “green” products, in our schools and homes for cleaning, lunch programs, and a variety of activities
- Educator think tanks in schools that consider environmental issues and how to implement appropriate educational programming in the school
- Connection to Israeli projects and concerns that are connected to the environment

Specific programming and experiences:

- Environmental camping programs that are provided in the area are used by the schools (e.g. Camp Cross Valley in the New York Catskill Mountains, Teva Learning Center in the Boston area,)
- Kashering chickens, associated with study of Torah and laws of Kashrut
- Examination of different hooves of various animals as connected with study of Kashrut
- Use of community resources that work with animals, associations with area zoos
- Planting trees, seeds, gardens and vegetable patches on school grounds
- Baking in solar ovens
- Recycling programs
- Statistics research about energy, resources, amounts of garbage generations and related issues
- Collecting of wasted resources (e.g. uneaten food at a Teva experience) and weighing it daily; with goal of encouraging students to change their habits and eating all of the food that they take; other experiences related to teaching *Bal Tashchit* (the *mitzvah* not to waste resources)
- Water testing and usage
- Dedicated study of animals and their life cycles
- Letter writing campaigns to newspapers as well as Congresspeople and Senators
- Homework assignments that bring environmental elements and Jewish living together (e.g. go home, open the refrigerator, and thank G-d for all that you have)
- Changing of actual lunch, maintenance and other programs that use resources in schools as a result of “green” consciousness

B. What are the challenges and barriers in your school? What gets in the way of teaching about the Environment in your school?

With respect to challenges and barriers that are confronted in the schools represented at the Focus Group meetings regarding implementation of more and meaningful Environmental Educational programming, the following were reported:

- Community pressure to stay away from perceived liberal causes
- Political and religious leanings of the communities that make the presentation of this topic challenging
- Lack of understanding that this area of concern is a normative and important part of our character development and responsibility as observant Jews

- Lack of administrative support and indication of this as a priority for the school and in respect to its stated mission
- Environmental Education is seen solely as the domain of the Science teacher and does not have much presence in the rest of the school
- “Pushback” at some schools regarding bringing General Studies and Jewish Studies together
- Lack of articulation of environmental sustainability as community priority, and therefore often not a school priority
- Lack of cooperation of locality for school initiated recycling efforts and programs (this was reported in the Greater New York area meeting)
- Lack of feeling of vulnerability and connectedness to this issue from families that are well off and use energy and resources in ways that are not necessarily the most efficient
- Lack of ongoing connection to environment is a particular challenge for students and families that live in urban areas, as do many of our students; for these populations, developed materials must take their reality into account (e.g. these groups might be much more ready to study and address Global Warming than protection of the wetlands)
- Higher cost of “green” products and making our institutions “green”
- Concerns regarding “economy of time” and lack of a feeling of enough time to cover all that needs to be presented and addressed (several educators noted that while Science is included in the curriculum, it is not given nearly enough time and this was acknowledged as a characteristic challenge for Jewish Day Schools)
- Lack of materials for teaching and support for staff development as well as time to learn new strategies and materials to be handed over to classes
- Need for graduated, scaled and cumulative curricular plan to use and show how and where to integrate and place various units of study
- Need for venues to practice what is taught in such lessons and for students to activate what they learn
- Need for parent education, family education, community education, staff and faculty educational strategies to parallel and complement school programming
- Need for presentation of programs that are doable and applicable within community restraints and parameters regarding resources, available support systems and professional guidance
- Consideration of the differences between potential and realistic involvements in such programs individually, communally, and in home environments
- Fear of alienating parents by educating for changed behaviors (It is valuable to note that the level of awareness regarding Environmental Sustainability motivated practices was different from community to community, with this factor presenting as a less difficult sell in the Greater Boston community)
- Fear of extremism in any cause and ramifications for drastic changes in community and institutional practices
- Note was made in the New York group of the potential difference between co-educational environments, all-girl schools and all-boy schools in terms of readiness and receptivity towards engaging with this agenda item; it was also indicated that the perception of such differences does not always reflect reality

C. What resources do we have and are needed; where do we go from here?

Regarding resources and programs that have been used by participating schools, the following information and ideas were gleaned from the focus group meetings as being valuable:

- Resource materials shared that have been produced by Canfei Nesharim
- The Washington Zoo
- The Bronx Zoo

- The Jason Project (Water testing and checking)
- Shmitah Hydroponic Project
- Delta Science Education Kits for classroom use
- Science in a Box Kits
- National Science Teachers' Association (NSTA)
- Foss Science Kits
- Water testing kits and other resources from Jewish National Fund (no cost)
- Carolina Biological resource material
- Use of *Echinuch.org* for teachers to share lesson plans and teaching strategies
- American Society of Curriculum Development (ASCD)
- Federation of Northern New Jersey's Mitzvah Day

In thinking about future directions, educators in all groups (with very few exceptions) indicated that they agreed that the goal of having Orthodox Day Schools engage in meaningful and ongoing Torah-based Environmental Education elements is definitely desirable and doable, and sought Canfei Nesharim's help to implement this.

The following concerns, warnings, and advice were suggested:

- The point was made that this is not just a matter of inclusion of a subject in an already overcrowded curriculum; more than that we are talking about the presence of an ongoing and purposeful sensitivity and awareness that needs to come from within our schools and systems.
- Entry points for such planning need to be carefully chosen; different participants indicated the value of using both Jewish Studies and General Studies (particularly Social Studies and Science units) as the means of introduction of this issue.
- While this is a concern and our conscience should be raised, it is possible to “overdo” it in overstating the importance of the presence of Torah-based Environmental Educational programming. This is one of many topics that should have its rightful place in the curriculum.
- Teachers are often very compartmentalized and focused on their subjects only; training is needed in interdisciplinary work and thematic teaching as well as how to “jump to the other side” of the curriculum program.
- Decisions have to be made regarding where in the curriculum such units and study should exist; further provisions must be made to facilitate the use of interdisciplinary programming and planning.
- In the case of real-life crises (the current Rubashkin situation) that occur; there is a need to distinguish between provision of a response which is beyond the scope of Canfei Nesharim and the provision of resources to aid communities in addressing their own development of a response.
- Given that we live in a disposable culture, teaching about Environmental Sustainability is a counter-cultural pursuit. How do we try to address this through instilling a sense of Jewish responsibility and mandate to care for and relate properly to the world in which we live?

Finally, here is a composite wish list of resources and programs that educators would like to see developed that was suggested by the groups of educators at these meetings. This listing included the following elements, which can be compared to the listing that is indicated in the Question 3 listing in Appendix C, in which participants indicated interest in all included elements and also suggested their own.

- Development of units and materials specifically for Orthodox day School teachers and populations
- Appropriate adaptations for existing materials so that they include Torah based sources and are appropriate for our populations; Torah/Hagim guides could be developed for existing materials

- Developing and providing curricular frames and structures so that the resources that are available for general learning and use can be readily available for classroom use
- In-service, training and ongoing support for the presentation and use of developed materials, preferably by Science and Judaic Studies educators as a team
- Indication of entry points (General Studies/Science – stated as a preference - and/or Judaic Studies) for developed materials and appropriate grades for their inclusion
- Development of an overall chart to indicate what lessons and materials are appropriate for each grade/range of grades, pre-requisites for different lessons and materials, etc.
- Provision of materials and training for facilitation of integrated educational planning
- Use of technology to further Torah-based environmental programming and actions (This was discussed at the Boston area Focus Group due to recent opportunities presented to Canfei Nesharim)
- Provision of programs and resources for family and parent programming as well as community wide programs
- Provision of programs for educators in area schools
- Encourage creation of clubs and groups to work on Environmental Sustainability in our Orthodox Jewish Day Schools
- Use existing formats (such as Yeshiva University’s Communities of Practice) to bring schools and communities together to share and develop more resources and practices
- Use of conference calls, listservs, email communications, etc. to facilitate communication between schools who want to move ahead with this agenda
- Development of a National Bee format regarding Jewish approach and teachings about the Environment and our relationship to it
- Framework for mass purchase of “green” products and encouragement of Orthodox Day Schools to use them
- Provision of a list of speakers and programs available to schools
- Writing a cover grant for Orthodox Day Schools that are interested in moving in this direction
- Creation of a system of pilot schools who would partner with Canfei Nesharim in this area of educational programming

IV. Recommendations of Strategies for Educational Planning:

What follows is a listing of suggested strategies that would be valued and helpful to the schools that were involved in the three focus groups; and by association, these recommendations are being made for the general world of Orthodox Day Schools in the United States. Suggestions are followed by comments regarding plausibility, what is involved, and degree of effort involved in implementation of these suggestions.

Please note that the order and presentation of these strategies are informed by the most recent organizational direction determined by Canfei Nesharim and its Executive Director and Board. This plan is the direct result of the feedback from the focus groups as reflected here. To that end, the defined direction for 2009 has been stated as follows:

“Canfei Nesharim will continue to engage Jewish educators and their students through conference calls and through the provision of three new curriculum modules.”

These modules are defined as:

- “Our Relationship to the Land” to be presented within the season of *Sefirat HaOmer*;
- “Precious Water” to be presented within the *Sukkot* season; and

- “Saving Energy” to be presented within the *Channukah* season.

The recommendations suggested by the three focus groups that will be considered and addressed through the development of these materials are as follows:

1. **Development of a group of committed schools who would meet by phone and other means of networking to share what they are doing, resources that are available, roadblocks and challenges being addressed, and meaningful directions that are taken. This would be identified as a group of pilot schools dedicated to Environmental Educational programming.** It was indicated at a relatively early part of this process that there were some hopes that in coordination with Yeshiva University and its Azrieli Graduate School of Education and their Communities of Practice program, this would be a possibility. At the point that this report is being submitted, it is unclear as to whether this resource can be used; other possibilities may have to be explored. It appears evident that this could fit into the organizational plan of *Canfei Nesharim* presently being developed, with dedicated time of existing staff and/or educational consultant. Further, given that some avenues are being explored in terms of use of technology, this agenda item could be addressed as part of the organizational use of technological resources.
2. **Development of curricular frames and materials that would facilitate use of existing resource materials provided by Canfei Nesharim and other organizations.** This is an entire area of activity in which there was expressed need in all three focus groups (as well as the additional group involved in the phone conference) to be considered seriously. It is suggested that to best meet the expressed needs of these schools and educators, *Canfei Nesharim* should dedicate itself to this area of development of educational materials. This would be the portfolio for an educational professional. As these suggestions were followed by indication that such materials would definitely be used, this would amplify the value of such efforts. It should be noted that the three modules presently indicated above that will be created will meet the needs suggested in several of the following categories:
 - a. **Curricular frames for existing resource materials** – Teachers need curriculum, not just resource books. There are many wonderful materials developed by *Canfei Nesharim* (e.g. Compendium, Parshat HaShavuah materials, etc.) that are good resources and with curricular frames and lesson plan guides, teachers and educational leaders indicated interest in using them in their schools.
 - b. **Adaptations for existing Environmental Educational materials in general world of education** - There are wonderful general education/Science/Environmental materials that are available that could be adapted for our Orthodox Day Schools. Instead of “reinventing the wheel,” a preference was stated for making sure that the wheel fits.
 - c. **Curriculum Map for Environmental Education** – Educators indicated that a map of programs available for various grades and settings as well as suggested entry points, with indication of such as well as any need for pre-requisites, previous study, etc. would be of great help in guiding the purposeful use of such materials. This would not necessarily be part of the 2009 plan specifically, but the materials developed would clearly begin to form a skeletal structure that could eventually become such a curriculum map.
 - d. **Torah/Hagim/Environment Guides** – Focus groups spoke about the value of having a guide that prompts teachers and educators to be able to use known material (especially in the case of Limudei Kodesh teachers) as “jumping off points” to address concerns, lessons and suggestions about how we interact with the Environment in our world today as human beings and as Torah-observant Jews.

- e. **Development of additional materials** as needed – If there are defined areas in need after consideration of all available resources, as indicated above, additional curricular resources might be needed. While this is the least defined element at this time, it is clear already that some supportive materials will be needed to insure optimal use of created units and modules. For example, as this work begins, we are creating
 - i. **Listing of Environmental terms for Jewish Educators**
 - ii. **Listing of Jewish/Values terms for teachers not in Jewish Studies Departments**
 - iii. **Listing of programs and projects that are presently being done** and came from suggestions in the Focus Groups, to be distributed to all interested schools

Further, it should be noted that these goals would be further facilitated by the availability of existing publications of **Canfei Nesharim**, especially its **Compendium of Sources in Halacha and the Environment** and **Eitz Chayim Hee: A Torah Commentary for Environmental Learning and Action**, as these are wonderful sources that can easily be referenced and developed within these educational units and guides.

The following suggested strategies do not fit directly into the planned agenda for 2009 but might be considered in some contained form as additional support, given that they do not necessarily require extended additional effort:

- 3. **Provision of a listing of available speakers and programs that could be brought to our schools.**
This is a service that was indicated would be valuable to our schools and it is an important opportunity for *Canfei Nesharim* to be perceived as a visible and valuable networking vehicle as well as a resource for programming. This would require some dedicated time and resources of professional staff, use of a composite listserv for communication, and no outright additional costs. Clearly, resources and programs mentioned at these meetings can provide a beginning template for such a list, to be more comprehensive and include details about programs and institutions, including costs, support available, populations that can use them (e.g. urban or suburban/rural) and so forth.
- 4. **Investigation of possibility of mass purchase of green products for our schools at reduced cost so our schools can afford to live a more environmentally conscious lifestyle while teaching our students and community the value of doing so.** This is clearly something that could be investigated and again would be a means of our schools seeing *Canfei Nesharim* as a valuable and needed resource. This would involve availability of information, and potentially some coordination on the part of the *Canfei Nesharim* professional.

The last three strategies are more long range and developmental and may inform continued work of Canfei Nesharim with its school populations:

- 5. **Writing a cover grant to help schools who want to be more environmentally responsible and proactive do so through provision of resource funding to enable the accomplishment of this goal.**
See #4 above. This would potentially involve more time on the part of the professional staff and would have to be implemented through a defined group of schools in the beginning who would want to and be committed to piloting such programming and responsible planning.
- 6. **Development of parent programming, family involvements, and community wide programming resources** – It is clear that there is a feeling that the school cannot function in a vacuum and that there

must be support and resources for the other target groups that are associated with the school community so that the programming implemented has the maximum impact on the larger entity. This may also dovetail with the congregational pillar of the five year strategy currently being created by *Canfei Nesharim*. This would clearly require time on the part of a professional to put together and could evolve from some of the other suggested involvements here, specifically this would make a great topic for any network of educators and would most likely be included in collecting programs and resources.

7. **In-service and professional development programming for faculty and educational staff** – It was indicated in all three focus groups that the training element is critical to proper use and implementation of available materials and resources. This could be done in communities (with note taken of the model used in the San Francisco Bay area) with in-service training being made available, after which there could be contact with the professionals of *Canfei Nesharim* and participation in the networks to be developed (see #1 above). Through this involvement and contact with *Canfei Nesharim*, it is hoped that a cadre of educators sensitive to and involved with environmental sustainability will be developed until the time when this is normative in the Orthodox Day School world. This, along with other elements on this listing, can and should be included in the five year plan in which the organization is presently involved in developing.

V. Summation:

Clearly, there is interest in this topic, the timing is right and there is value to striking when the iron is hot, so to speak. At present there are various efforts and activities at different schools for various population pockets. What was considered to be most valuable by the educators in attendance at these focus groups was

- the need to streamline in provision of resources,
- to share and network what is being done, and
- to work on the creation of a new energy regarding this issue in our schools.

These findings were confirmed in the very positive evaluations that were presented to and completed by participants in the second and third Focus Group meetings (see Appendix D for the evaluation form used).

The input in this report reflects the input of a total of twenty eight professional Jewish educators, with the following statistics to be considered:

- Two professionals represented *Canfei Nesharim*
- Five professionals represented three Bureaus of Jewish Education and Yeshiva University
- Twenty one professionals represented a total of fourteen Orthodox Jewish Day Schools in three larger communities (eleven schools) and three smaller communities (one school each in the phone conference)

There is an agenda indicated here that can be used as *Canfei Nesharim* moves forward in addressing the expressed needs of our Orthodox Jewish Day Schools.

APPENDIX A

Focus Group #1 **Greater Washington D.C. Area** **Monday, June 23, 2008** **10:30 a.m. – 1:30 p.m.**

Present:

- Avi West, Partnership for Jewish Living and Learning
- Rebecca Weisman, Partnership for Jewish Living and Learning
- Sharon Turpie, Melvin J Berman Hebrew Academy & Hebrew Day Institute
- Emily Friedman, Melvin J Berman Hebrew Academy
- Rabbi Jack Bieler, Kemp Mill Synagogue
- Rabbi Yosef Sandberg, The Torah School
- Jodi Mailman, The Torah School
- Rabbi David Serkin, Hebrew Day School
- Evonne Marzouk, Canfei Nesharim
- Sunnie Epstein, Canfei Nesharim

Focus Group #2 **Greater New York Area** **Wednesday, September 24, 2008** **10:30 a.m. – 1:30 p.m.**

Present:

- Evonne Marzouk, Canfei Nesharim
- Sunnie Epstein, Canfei Nesharim
- Lori Arfe, Communities of Practice, Azrielli Graduate School of YU
- Rabbi Ellis Bloch, BJE Director
- Jonathan Knapp, Yavneh, Head of School
- Regina Neiger, Yavneh, Science Teacher
- Nira Colon, NSHA, Science Teacher
- Rabbi Mordecai Salzberg, NSHS, Jewish Studies Teacher in Elementary School
- Gerald Kirshenbaum, Bi-Cultural Day School, Head of School
- Kyra Bernstein, Ramaz Day School, Student Activities Co-ordinator, Lower School

Focus Group #3 **Greater Boston Area** **December 8, 2008** **12:30 p.m. – 3:30 p.m.**

Present:

- Evonne Marzouk, Canfei Nesharim
- Sunnie Epstein, Canfei Nesharim
- Mr. Nate Berman, Maimonides Middle/Upper School
- Mr. Avi Pittleman, Maimonides Elementary School
- Rabbi Mendel Lewitin, Striar Hebrew Academy
- Rabbi Mendel Nagel, New England Hebrew Academy
- Ms. Chana Posner, New England Hebrew Academy
- Ms. Naomi Chernin, Bureau of Jewish Education of Greater Boston
- Ms. Penni Moss, Bureau of Jewish Education of Greater Boston

APPENDIX B

Environmental Engagement in Orthodox Day Schools: An Educational Strategy Questionnaire for Focus Group in Washington D.C.

Introduction: Welcome to this focus group meeting! We are so glad that you have agreed to join us as we work towards our established goal of “develop[ing] a strategic plan to identify the best products, strategies, and venues for introducing the connection between Torah and the environment to Orthodox day schools.” (Ignition Grant Proposal, Canfei Nesharim, page 1)

Please take note of the following challenge that is stated as the driving force behind these meetings and your involvement, for which we are so grateful:

The Jewish tradition contains far-reaching teachings about our responsibility to protect the environment, for human health and well-being, and for all creatures. However, these environmental challenges, and the teachings that address them, are not being taught in Orthodox day schools. The lack of understanding about environmental issues within the Orthodox Jewish community has political, environmental, religious, and social consequences. (Ignition Grant Proposal, Canfei Nesharim, pages 1 – 2)

How/does this statement resonate with you?

As Orthodox day schools, let us consider the following aspects of our curriculum that could potentially serve as entry points to discuss these important concerns that impact upon all of us living on this planet and to do so from a specifically Halachic point of view. As we do so, let us know if your school is presently doing these things or would like to do so if the proper support and resources are available.

- Given that this school year is a *Shmitah* year, there has been a unique opportunity to teach about the environment and some of the Jewish teachings relevant to its preservation and health. How many of our schools have taken this opportunity?
- Do we use the *Shalosh Regalim* as another opportunity for such focus in terms of the harvest cycle and various Jewish laws related to it as well as other environmental considerations?
- Do we address environmental issues when we teach about *Kashrut*, given the natural connection to such concerns as compassion for animals (*Tzaar Baalei Chaim*), “limits” on what we choose to consume, and impact of *Kashrut* practices on the environment and its resources?
- How could the learning of *Tefilat HaGeshem* and *Tefilat HaTal* be used to explain yet another connection between the environment and Jewish learning?
- How many other *Tefillah* connections can be used to introduce this agenda of caring for and being responsible for our environment and its state of being?
- How many times are there links to environmental concerns in our yearly cycle of teaching *Parshat HaShavuah*?
- How much are our concerns about the environment connected to our Jewish values and texts?
- How many *Mitzvot HaAretz* are related to environmental concerns and land usage and protection?
- When do environmental concerns appear in Torah and other Jewish texts we are studying as part of our ongoing educational program?
- When are there opportunities in our Science program to bring in these concerns about the environment with an interdisciplinary connection to the Jewish texts and topics we are studying?

Obviously, we can and should brainstorm about other such opportunities. In our doing so, help us as we explore the following issues together.

1. First of all, do you agree with the premise in this introduction and do you agree with the problem and challenge articulated? Explain your answer.
2. What opportunities explained above and others do you use for addressing of concerns related to our environment from a specifically Jewish/Halachic perspective in your schools? From a Science perspective? In what grades is this work done generally?
3. To what degree are the students in your schools aware of the following environmental concerns:
 - a. Energy conservation
 - b. Pollution of water, land and air
 - c. Extensive and excessive use of limited resources (Resource depletion)
 - d. Decreasing supply of water (including direct impact on Israel)
 - e. Impacts of traditional agriculture in the developing world as well as industrialized countries
 - f. Human relationship to the land (connection to Kashrut, laws of Shmitah, etc.)
 - g. Opportunities for turning our personal lives, institutions and agencies “green” in our/their activities (e.g. recycling, careful purchase of cleaning products, integrated pest management, etc.)
 - h. Our responsibility to share space with all of G-d’s creatures and showing kindness to animals
 - i. Protection of local green space, including parks and wilderness
 - j. Preservation of precious lands at the national and global level
 - k. Understanding of the water cycle, and needs of soil and vegetation that grows in it
 - l. Environmental benefits of reducing beef consumption
 - m. Informed consumerism and making environmentally friendly purchases
4. What programs and courses are taught that are related to these concerns in your school? In what grades are these programs and courses taught?
5. What special resources and programs that are dedicated to concerns about the environment are available in your area and are used as resources?
6. What types of resources would be helpful to you and your schools in facilitating the use of Environmental Science education for your students:
 - a. Developed units that would continue over a course of time that are integrated and incorporate Environmental Science and Torah
 - b. Existing units that are dedicated to the teaching of Environmental Science and you would make the connections to Jewish sources and concerns
 - c. Existing units that are dedicated to the teaching of Environmental Science and connections to Judaic texts would be suggested in separate materials
 - d. Specific “packaged programs” that could be implemented and/or adapted as needed
 - e. Established contacts with agencies in your area that could provide such programs in terms of the Environment
 - f. A composite listing of resources that are available for this agenda, with a focus on organizations sensitive to Halachic observance (e.g. publications by Aish HaTorah)
 - g. Articles and general resources that interface issues indicated here with texts studied

- h. Lab experiences and hands on lessons
 - i. Bubble experiences
 - j. Outside speakers, assembly programs, Yom Iyun type programs
 - k. Name other types of programs and resources that would be helpful
7. Is your school ready to strategize and be part of an effort to implement Torah/Jewish text - based Environmental Education within the next two years?
- a. Do you feel that you can be an example to other schools if you are already addressing this larger agenda?
 - b. What programs and resources do you already use that you recommend as being available options to other schools?
 - c. Would you like support from other schools that are addressing this agenda in how to get started?
 - d. What are your main goals that you want to meet by such programming?
 - e. What do you feel that your school needs to do to prepare for inclusion of such programming?
 - f. What grades and subjects do you see using for the purpose of inclusion of this programming?
 - g. What are the potential roadblocks for inclusion of such programming in your school?
 - h. What are your fears and/or concerns about getting involved in such programming?
 - i. Are you aware of and/or have you participated in any failed attempts to introduce such programming in your school or schools like your school; what lessons do you think that we need to learn from such attempts?
8. What else should be put on the table that we have missed?

APPENDIX C

**Revised Model for Focus Groups
New York and Boston
September 24, 2008, Wednesday
10:30 a.m. – 1:30 p.m.
December 8, 2008
12:30 p.m. – 3: 30 p.m.**

Introduction: Where Canfei Nesharim is and where we see the schools project going. Looking towards a pilot and relationship with YU. This is the second meeting and what we have learned already. Introduction of players.

(30 minutes)

Pass around sign in sheet (names, addresses, school, position and email).

1. What's going on now in your school?

Watch for:

- a. Where is it happening?
- b. Who initiated it?
- c. Who is involved?
- d. Is it formal (structural) or informal (splash) programming?

We want to make use of what is going on and then complement what is happening? (45 minutes)

Handout – sections one and two

2. What are the challenges and barriers?

Watch for:

- a. Teachers are busy
- b. School has no mission
- c. Not important enough
- d. Don't know what to do
- e. Fear of slippery slope and liberal associated issues (45 minutes)

3. What resources and where do we go from here? (45 minutes)

Handout – sections three and four
Portfolio of materials

Each conversation takes about 45 minutes and then lunch in the middle.

Hand out brief evaluation.

Handout #1 Side A

How do these Jewish text/observance related connections present in your school?

- When the school year is a *Shmitah* year, do you use this opportunity to teach about the environment and some of the Jewish teachings relevant to its preservation and health?
- Do we use the *Shalosh Regalim* as a focus in terms of the harvest cycle and various Jewish laws related to it as well as other environmental considerations?
- Do we address environmental issues when we teach about *Kashrut*, given the natural connection to such concerns as compassion for animals (*Tzaar Baalei Chaim*), “limits” on what we choose to consume (*Bal Tashchit*), and impact of *Kashrut* practices on the environment and its resources?
- Does the learning of *Tefilat HaGeshem* and *Tefilat HaTal* provide another connection between the environment and Jewish learning?
- How many other *Tefillah* connections are used to introduce the notion of caring for and being responsible for our environment and its state of being?
- How many times are there links to environmental concerns in our yearly cycle of teaching *Parshat HaShavuah*?
- How much are our concerns about the environment connected to our Jewish values and texts?
- How many *Mitzvot HaAretz* are related to environmental concerns and land usage and protection?
- When do environmental concerns appear in Torah and other Jewish texts we are studying as part of our ongoing educational program?
- When are there opportunities in our Science program to bring in these concerns about the environment with an interdisciplinary connection to the Jewish texts and topics we are studying?

Handout #1 Side B

To what degree do the following environmental concerns appear in your Science/Social Studies curriculum and/or elsewhere in your school’s program?

- Energy conservation
- Pollution of water, land and air
- Extensive and excessive use of limited resources (Resource depletion)
- Decreasing supply of water (including direct impact on Israel)
- Impacts of traditional agriculture in the developing world as well as industrialized countries
- Human relationship to the land (connection to *Kashrut*, laws of *Shmitah*, etc.)
- Opportunities for turning our personal lives, institutions and agencies “green” in our/their activities (e.g. recycling, careful purchase of cleaning products, integrated pest management, etc.)
- Our responsibility to share space with all of G-d’s creatures and showing kindness to animals
- Protection of local green space, including parks and wilderness
- Preservation of precious lands at the national and global level
- Understanding of the water cycle, and needs of soil and vegetation that grows in it
- Environmental benefits of reducing beef consumption
- Informed consumerism and making environmentally friendly purchases

Handout #2 Side A

What types of resources would be helpful to you and your schools in facilitating the use of Environmental Science education for your students:

- Developed units that would continue over a course of time that are integrated and incorporate Environmental Science and Torah
- Existing units that are dedicated to the teaching of Environmental Science and you would make the connections to Jewish sources and concerns
- Existing units that are dedicated to the teaching of Environmental Science and connections to Judaic texts would be suggested in separate materials
- Specific “packaged programs” that could be implemented and/or adapted as needed
- Established contacts with agencies in your area that could provide such programs in terms of the Environment
- A composite listing of resources that are available for this agenda, with a focus on organizations sensitive to Halachic observance (e.g. publications by Aish HaTorah)
- Articles and general resources that interface issues indicated here with texts studied
- Lab experiences and hands on lessons
- Bubble experiences
- Outside speakers, assembly programs, Yom Iyun type programs
- Name other types of programs and resources that would be helpful

Handout #2 Side B

Is your school ready to strategize and be part of an effort to implement Torah/Jewish text - based Environmental Education within the next two years?

- Do you feel that you can be an example to other schools if you are already addressing this larger agenda?
- What programs and resources do you already use that you recommend as being available options to other schools?
- Would you like support from other schools that are addressing this agenda in how to get started?
- What are your main goals that you want to meet by such programming?
- What do you feel that your school needs to do to prepare for inclusion of such programming?
- What grades and subjects do you see using for the purpose of inclusion of this programming?
- What are the potential roadblocks for inclusion of such programming in your school?
- What are your fears and/or concerns about getting involved in such programming?
- Are you aware of and/or have you participated in any failed attempts to introduce such programming in your school or schools like your school; what lessons do you think that we need to learn from such attempts?

APPENDIX D

**Evaluation Form for Focus Groups
(Used in New York and Boston)**

Thank you for participating in our Educator Focus Group! We are interested in learning more about the effectiveness of our session, so that we can continually improve our delivery for future audiences.

Your honest and thoughtful feedback is important to us. *Please respond to all questions below.*

<i>To what extent do you agree with the following statements</i>	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
	1	2	3	4	5
1. <i>The focus group</i> helped me explore opportunities for introducing the connections between Judaism and the environment into my school.					
2. In this session, I learned <i>new ideas for Torah-environment education</i> for my school.					
3. This session helped me <i>explore and identify opportunities to overcome barriers</i> for introducing Torah-environment education into my school.					
4. <i>The resources provided</i> at this session will be useful to me in bringing this education to my school in the coming year.					
5. <i>I am interested in partnering</i> with Canfei Nesharim in bringing Torah-environment education to my school in the coming year.					

6. One element of today’s focus group that stands out most is . . .

7. The strongest elements of the focus group were:

8. The focus group could be improved in the following ways:

9. Additional comments:

THANK YOU AGAIN FOR YOUR FEEDBACK!