



RIVER OUT OF EDEN: WATER, ECOLOGY AND THE JORDAN RIVER IN THE ABRAHAMIC TRADITIONS

EcoPeace Middle East | March 2017

And Lot lifted up his eyes, and beheld
all the plain of Jordan, that it was well
watered everywhere...”

Genesis 13:10

COVENANT FOR THE JORDAN RIVER

We recognize that the Jordan River Valley is a landscape of outstanding ecological and cultural importance. It connects the eco-systems of Africa and Asia, forms a sanctuary for wild plants and animals, and has witnessed some of the most significant advances in human history. The first people ever to leave Africa walked through this valley and drank from its springs. Farming developed on these plains, and in Jericho we see the origins of urban civilization itself. Not least, the river runs through the heart of our spiritual traditions: some of the founding stories of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam are set along its banks and the valley contains sites sacred to half of humanity. By any measure, this landscape must be counted as part of the heritage of humankind.

But over the past 50 years, the Lower Jordan River has been destroyed. 96% of its historic flow has been diverted. What little water remains is polluted with saline and effluent, including untreated sewage. The valley's wetlands have dried up, its springs are failing, and half its biodiversity has been lost. This is not just a tragedy for wildlife: families have seen their fields turn to dust, not from a lack of water but from the injustice of its distribution.

The demise of the Jordan and the collapse of the valley's eco-system represents a failure of our most basic responsibility towards the species whose habitats have been destroyed and the ecological systems that sustain life on earth. It is a neglect that leaves us impoverished, that cripples the growth of an economy based on tourism, and that exacerbates the political conflicts that divide this region. It also exemplifies a wider failure to serve as custodians of the planet: if we cannot protect a place of such exceptional value, what part of the earth will we hand on intact to our children?

We have a different vision of this valley: a vision in which a clean, living river flows from the Sea of Galilee to the Dead Sea; in which the valley's plants and animals are afforded the water they

need to flourish; in which the springs flow as they have for millennia; and in which the water extracted for human use is divided equitably between the nations that share the valley and the people who live here.

Realizing this vision will not be easy. But difficulty cannot be an excuse for inaction. We therefore call upon the governments of the countries that share this watershed to make a serious commitment of resources and political capital to the rehabilitation of the Jordan River. As individuals and organizations, as members of civil society, and as religious or community leaders, we also affirm that this is a landscape of universal ecological, cultural, and spiritual importance, and commit to work towards the vision expressed in this covenant.

Dear Friends,

This is a toolkit intended to help multi-faith communities around the world learn about the condition of the Jordan River and join the efforts to rehabilitate the once mighty river.

The first section describes the demise of the Jordan River, what went wrong, and why it matters. The second section provides a compilation of writings about the place of the Jordan River in the Christian, Jewish and Muslim traditions, the sacredness of water, and the spiritual dimension of protecting and rehabilitating the natural world. Three essays about the state of the river and the role of multi-faith communities in its rehabilitation have been included in the toolkit. You will also find sacred texts, prayers and essays. You are welcome to use these works as the basis for your own presentations, workshops or sermons or to adapt them to suit your audiences.

Section three includes sample lesson plans and questions to assist educators in designing programs for a wide range of age groups. The final pages contain suggestions for how your community can support regional efforts to rehabilitate the Jordan River. We hope that you will urge decision makers to join in the revitalization of the Jordan. Additional resources to support awareness campaigns and plan visits to the river are available at www.ecopeaceme.org.

Similar toolkits were previously designed specifically for Jewish, Muslim and Christian communities and are available in Arabic, Hebrew and English at www.ecopeaceme.org.

Thank you for participating in the campaign to revive the Jordan River.

With gratitude,

EcoPeace Middle East

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I. BACKGROUND

The Jordan River has suffered an ecological collapse.
What went wrong and why it matters.



INTRODUCTION: Water, Ecology and the Jordan River – an issue of concern and opportunity for cooperative action

Imagine the River Jordan.

In the mind's eye we see a great river – a river that flows through a region of great cultural and religious diversity, a river that both connects and divides, an entry point for interacting, understanding and building partnerships.

It brings life to the Holy Land described in the Quran as the “land that We had blessed for the worlds” (Quran, 21:71).

We know that this river is important in the stories of the Prophets Joshua (Yūsha ‘ibn Nūn), John the Baptist (Yahyā ibn Zakarīyā) and Jesus (Īsā) – peace be upon them all – and that many of the closest Companions of the Prophet Mohammed (SAAS) are also buried in the valley, to the east of the Jordan. They include Zayd ibn Al-Harithah, the adopted son of the Prophet (SAAS); Ja‘far ibn Abi Talib, the cousin of the Prophet (SAAS); Abu ‘Ubaydah ibn al-Jarrah, one of the first to accept Islam and later supreme commander of the Arab armies under Caliph Umar; Bilal bin Rabah, who served as mu‘azin to the Prophet (SAAS); Dirar bin Al-Azwar, an early Companion and renowned warrior; and Sharhabil Bin Hassneh, among the

most trusted of the Prophet’s (SAAS) Companions and, according to some, one of the scribes of the Holy Quran.

For Christians, the name calls up an image that has been painted a thousand times: Jesus standing in the water, his head bowed in prayer, while John pours the water of baptism over Him. As Matthew tells us –

As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, “This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased”

Matthew 3:16-17

The river in which this baptism takes place is, in the Christian imagination, a mighty river – a river that, according to the book of Joshua, “overfloweth all his banks all the time of harvest” (Joshua 3:15). For Christians, the Jordan is a symbol of purity. Christ’s baptism in the river marks His revelation as the Son of God and the beginning of His ministry on Earth.



In Jewish tradition, the Jordan River serves as a place of connection. The power of God touches down here when the water retreats to allow the People of Israel to cross over and when Naaman, general of an enemy army, is cured of his physical afflictions and antipathy toward Israel. Elijah the Prophet (Ilyā) boards a chariot of fire at the Jordan and soars to heavenly immortality. It is a significant crossing point where humans can be touched by divine power.

The banks of the Jordan have also inspired human connection and reconciliation. The very phrase “crossing the Jordan” signifies releasing the grievances and hindrances of the past in order to enter a new period of hope. After crossing the Jordan, Jacob (Ya`qub) reconciles with his brother Esau thereby ending the competition that defined their adult lives. Tradition teaches that Jacob (Ya`qub) and Esau were the ancestors of kingdoms on the west and east sides of the Jordan.

Vowing to survive through mutual, supportive co-dependence, two women from opposite sides cross the river together and flourish. The book of Ruth tells the inspiring story of how Ruth the Moabite and Naomi of Judah, who are from

kingdoms at the opposite sides of the Dead Sea, transform a situation of famine and loss into one of sustenance and rebirth. Navigating the Jordan together shows them that the tension between their countries need not impede a sustaining friendship.

Enmity melts, miracles occur, and new life begins at the Jordan.



AN ECOSYSTEM DESTROYED

Neither the natural beauty nor the spiritual and historic significance of the Jordan has been enough to save the river from being degraded.

In just over 50 years, the countries that share this watershed have dammed and diverted more than 96% of the river's historic flow. What little water remains is polluted with saline, sewage, and agricultural run-off. In places - including the place where Elijah ascended to heaven on a chariot of fire, the site where John baptized Jesus and where many of the closest Companions of the Prophet Mohammed SAAS (Peace Be Upon Him) are buried- the river is not much more than a stagnant canal of effluent.

As the river has dried up, the Jordan Valley has suffered an ecological collapse. Half the valley's biodiversity has been lost. The Dead Sea, sustained only by inflowing water from the Jordan, is sinking by more than a meter every year.

This is not just a tragedy for wildlife. Springs that flowed for thousands of years have started to falter and fail. Wells that supported farms and families have run dry. Refused access to the river and denied a fair share of the water pumped

from beneath the land, Palestinian communities have seen fields turn to dust, livelihoods lost, and families forced to migrate.

The neglect of this river shows a disregard for our spiritual traditions and cultural heritage, and for our moral responsibility as custodians of God's creation. It is a neglect that leaves us spiritually impoverished, and that carries real practical consequences - crippling the growth of an economy that could be supported by tourism and exacerbating the political conflicts that divide the region. The destruction of the Jordan has caused an ecological collapse whose severity and cost - economic, ecological, human - we are only now beginning to count.



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THE DESTRUCTION OF THE JORDAN SOME FACTS AND FIGURES

- The Lower Jordan Valley is divided between Jordanians, Israelis, and Palestinians. Palestinians have no access to the Jordan and do not receive water directly from the river.
- Until about 1950, some 1.3 billion cubic meters of water flowed through the valley every year.
- 96% of that flow has been diverted.
- Untreated or poorly treated sewage has been dumped or allowed to leak into the river for over 50 years from Israeli, Jordanian, and Palestinian communities.
- The diversion and pollution of this water has caused an ecological collapse - more than 50% of the valley's biodiversity has been lost.
- The dying of the Jordan is also causing the Dead Sea to disappear – it is now sinking at the rate of approximately one meter per year.
- EcoPeace Middle East estimates that Israel diverts about half of the river's average annual flow, while Syria and Jordan take the rest.



A FAILURE OF WISDOM

Why has this happened? How have we allowed this to happen to a place of such exceptional beauty and value?

At the root of the problem is conflict. The basin that drains into the Jordan River is divided between Lebanese, Syrians, Jordanians, Israelis, and Palestinians. Instead of seeing the valley as a single, trans-boundary watershed, these nations have raced to capture the greatest possible share of the Jordan River's water. EcoPeace Middle East estimates that Israel diverts about half of the river's average annual flow, while Syria and Jordan take about a quarter each. Palestinians, denied access to the river, take almost nothing.

Given the intensity of political conflict in the region, this zero-sum struggle for the valley's water might seem inevitable. But it is, in the long term, an approach that will undermine the interests of all concerned. This is a single watershed; the flow of its water does not correspond to the borders drawn on our maps, and its rain and rivers cannot be sustainably managed through a process of competition.

The demise of the Jordan also reveals a profound failure of respect for the natural and non-human world. We behave as though creation, including its water and all its forms of life, were nothing

more than a collection of resources to be mined for human use. This is surely not what was meant when God gave man dominion over the Earth.

To show respect to all living creatures is clearly expressed in the sunna of the Prophet Mohammed (SAAS) too. As recorded in the hadith, the Prophet (SAAS) said "There is reward in [caring for] every living being" (Sahih Muslim, Ch. 7).

Dr. Abdullah Omar Nasseef, Secretary General of the Muslim World League, wrote in the Islamic Declaration on Nature in Assisi in 1986 –

"For the Muslim, mankind's role on earth is that of a Khalifah – Vice-Regent or trustee of Allah. We are Allah's stewards and agents on Earth. We are not masters of this Earth; it does not belong to us to do what we wish. It belongs to Allah and He has entrusted us with its safekeeping."

This duty to care for the earth that God entrusted to us was modeled by Prophet Muhammad (SAAS), especially in regard to the use of water –

"Abdullah Ibn 'Amr reported that Prophet Muhammad (SAAS) "passed by Sa`d [Ibn Abi Waqqas] while he was performing ablution

and said to him: Why the excessive use of water? [Sa`d] asked: Even in ablution there is excessive use of water? [The Prophet] replied: Yes, even if you were at a flowing river.” (Narrated by Ibn Majah, Ch.2)”

As Avraham Kook, first Chief Rabbi of Israel, wrote

“There can be no doubt in the mind of any intelligent, thinking person that when the Torah instructs humankind to dominate – “And have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the sky, and over every living thing that moves upon the Earth” (Genesis 1:28) – it does not mean the domination of a harsh ruler, who afflicts his people and servants merely to fulfill his personal whim and desire, according to the crookedness of his heart.”

Our special place in God’s creation carries with it a responsibility to cherish this earth. In Genesis the words used to describe this duty are le’ovdah and leshomrah – to ‘serve’ and to ‘guard’ the creation. As Rabbi Jonathan Sacks has written –

“This is perhaps the best short definition of humanity’s responsibility for nature as the Bible conceives it. We do not own nature – “The earth is the Lord’s and the fullness thereof.” (Psalms 24:1) We are its stewards on behalf of God, who created and owns everything. As guardians of the earth, we are duty-bound to respect its integrity.”

As Father Lanfranco Serrini, the leader of the Franciscan friars at the time of the Assisi declarations on nature, has written –

“...man’s dominion cannot be understood as license to abuse, spoil, squander or destroy what God has made to manifest his glory. That dominion cannot be anything other than a stewardship in symbiosis with all creatures... At the risk of destroying himself, man may not reduce to chaos or disorder, or, worse still, destroy God’s bountiful treasures.”

Our special place in God’s creation carries with it a responsibility to cherish this earth. In the words of the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I –

“We are called to be stewards, and reflections of God’s love by example. Therefore, we proclaim the sanctity of all life, the entire creation being God’s and reflecting His continuing will that life abound...For humans to cause species to become extinct and to destroy the biological diversity of God’s creation, for humans to degrade the integrity of Earth by causing changes in its climate, by stripping the Earth of its natural forests or destroying its wetlands, for humans to injure other humans with disease, for humans to contaminate the Earth’s waters, its land, its air, and its life with poisonous substances— these are sins.”

The lack of a sense of wonder, the loss of reverence for life, the abandonment of our responsibility as custodians – all of this has contributed to the destruction of the Jordan. The revival of the river, then, requires not just a shift in policy, but a renewed and unified spiritual effort to honor the creation that God has entrusted to us.





A NEW VISION OF THE VALLEY

EcoPeace Middle East has a different vision for the Jordan Valley: a vision in which a clean, living river runs from the Sea of Galilee to the Dead Sea; in which the valley's plants, birds and animals are afforded the water they need to flourish; in which the springs flow as they have for millennia; and in which the water extracted for human use is divided equitably between the nations that share this valley and amongst the people who live here.

This is a vision that reflects the image of the valley that we see in the time of the Companions of the Prophet (SAAS), in the Tanakh, and the Gospels. It is a vision that honors our moral and spiritual responsibilities as Christians, Muslims, and Jews that shows respect and love for God's creation.

Given the scarcity of water in parts of this region and the state of relations between the countries that share the valley, realizing this vision will not be easy. But difficulty cannot be an excuse for inaction. To do nothing is to leave a landscape irreparably damaged by our own neglect. That is the course we are now on.

The starting point of any new approach must be to see this river and its tributaries as a single, interconnected ecosystem. If we want the Jordan to survive – if we want to use this water to sustain farms and families and economies – we have no choice but to manage it sustainably through cross-border cooperation.



A MEASURE OF PROGRESS

In the last three years we have seen the first signs of progress in the effort to revive the river.

Responding to years of advocacy, national governments and municipalities are now working to prevent the dumping or leaking of untreated sewage into the river. New treatment plants are in development in Jordanian, Israeli, and Palestinian communities throughout the Jordan Valley. EcoPeace Middle East is confident that half a century of using the Jordan as a sewage canal could soon come to an end.

2013 also saw the first release of clean water into the Jordan River in 49 years. The Israeli Water Authority has agreed to allocate 30mcm (million cubic meters) of water every year from the Sea of Galilee to help revive the river. This sets an important precedent for future allocations, but it falls far short of EcoPeace Middle East's recommendation that a third of the historic flow be returned as part of an international effort to rehabilitate the Jordan.

EcoPeace Middle East recently developed the first regional master plan for the management of the Jordan River Valley – a plan that takes into

account the valley's fragile ecology as well as recognizing the legitimate human need to draw on its water resources.

The plan puts scientifically sound and economically realistic policy recommendations behind our vision for the Jordan. Key recommendations include the return of 400-600 mcm (million cubic meters) of fresh water to the river; an end to the dumping of raw or poorly-treated sewage, saline, and other effluents into the stream; and the establishment of functioning international mechanisms for the joint management of the valley's water. With the support of national governments, this master plan can become the blueprint for the revival of the river.



JUSTICE, PEACE, PROSPERITY

We believe the Jordan can be revived without weakening the valley's agricultural economy or causing a shortage of water for human use. In the countries that share the valley, EcoPeace Middle East has identified over a billion cubic meters of water that could be saved (see the fact box below) and used to restore basic water rights to the Palestinians, to revive the Lower Jordan River, and to save the Dead Sea.

In the past decade EcoPeace Middle East has opened eco-parks – ideal places to stay and learn - on both sides of the Jordan. We are now working towards the creation of a trans-boundary ecological peace park centered on one of the river's historic crossing points, on the border between Israel and Jordan. The peace park will welcome visitors from both sides of the valley, providing a much needed point of access to a river that, for much of its length, remains a closed military zone.

EcoPeace Middle East believes that a living Jordan River can bring economic prosperity as well as ecological health to this valley, and that the management of the valley's water provides a practical opportunity for regional cooperation and the advancement of justice and peace.



REVIVING THE JORDAN

- EcoPeace Middle East recommends the release of 400- 600 million cubic meters (mcm) of fresh water into the river every year.
- In addition, the Jordan needs to flood at least once each year in order to keep the river's ecosystem healthy (100m³/sec for 24 hours).
- EcoPeace Middle East recommends that Israel releases 220mcm of water into the river each year, Syria 100mcm, and Jordan 90mcm. EcoPeace Middle East also recognizes that Palestine, as a riparian to the river, has a right to a fair share of the Jordan's water.
- EcoPeace Middle East's analysis has identified over a billion cubic meters of water that could be saved by these countries (primarily through reduction of leaks, improvements to irrigation efficiency, water harvesting and grey-water recycling, and demand management) and used to revive the river and to restore Palestinian water rights.
- The revival of the river requires that Jordanian, Israeli, and Palestinian decision-makers implement national policy strategies to manage their own demand for water, and to cooperate in the implementation of a comprehensive trans-boundary master plan for the river.
- The master plan determines levels of water flow, sets water quality standards, identifies ways to eliminate pollution, defines ecological corridors, supports environmental rehabilitation programs, and advances plans for the development of eco-tourism in the Jordan Valley.
- Implementation of the master plan requires the establishment of a functioning transboundary commission to manage the valley's water resources, resolve disputes, and strengthen the mechanisms of cooperation.



II. SOURCES OF INSPIRATION FROM THE ABRAHAMIC RELIGIONS

THE IMPORTANCE OF JORDAN RIVER FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE THREE MONOTHEISTIC RELIGIONS

Rev. Samer Azar

The three monotheistic religions, namely Judaism, Christianity and Islam share the core essence of Love to God and to the neighbor.

Love is the first commandment and the fulfillment of the Law. Loving God should be with all our hearts, with all our souls, with all our strengths and with all our minds. This love extends, as well, to our neighbors as ourselves (Lk 11: 27). Moreover it is incomplete unless it embraces the creation, which is the work of God's hands.

To Love God whom we don't see is a direct call to love our neighbor whom we see and deal with on daily basis and an indirect call to love the creation He perfectly designed as our world. Sin is not only bound when we err our neighbor, but also when we exploit our nature and cause damage to the beautiful creation. How often do we need to repent and regret our sins towards our failure to keep up God's creation!

Greediness and irresponsibility drive us to misuse our natural resources and distorts the order of our creation. We misinterpret God's command "to subdue it [The Earth]" (Genesis 1: 28). Thus, instead of caring for the creation, we exploit the nature and subdue it for our own interests and benefits.

The three monotheistic religions are one homogeneous voice towards caring for our world, for protecting our deteriorating environment, and for preserving the natural resources.

We will be asked before the throne of God of our stewardship towards His creation. This is part and parcel of our being as faithfuls and believers in God, the Creator, the Preserver and the Sustainer. Any alteration to the balance

of creation is a sin in God's eyes and requires repentance and atonement. This could only be done by feasible strategies to heal the repercussion of the damage caused by our human hands. Our multi-faith behooves us to reconcile with our creation and rectify what our hands have committed.

Part of the God's creation is the Jordan River, holy and blessed in the three monotheistic traditions. Moreover it is a sign of living water, a sign of Holy Baptism with the Holy Spirit, and a sign of healing and cleansing and a sign of God's blessings in the Land of Holiness. It is a symbol of regeneration and renewal. Millions of people around the world seek its holiness. Migrant birds as well cross the Jordan Valley twice annually from one continent to the other. Various birds and animals seek their natural habitat in this lowest point on earth.

It saddens us to see "the slow death" of such a river. Moreover, its pollution by the sewage water in the daylight is a source of grief and sorrow. Millions of rivers are around the world, but none could replace Jordan River or substitute for it. It is our responsibility to advocate for restoring life into it, so that it becomes as clean as crystal and continue to supply (breast-feed) the Dead Sea as its baby with the sap of life from the Lake of Tiberias and the tributaries flowing into it.

The Jordan River is part of God's creation, and as faithfuls from the three monotheistic religions we ought to advocate for and to work diligently for the rehabilitation of Jordan River.

One of the famous hymns for creation

“O Lord my God, when I in awesome wonder/
Consider all the works thy hand hath made/ I
see the stars, I hear the mighty thunder/ Thy
pow’r throughout the universe displayed.

Then sings my soul, my Savior God, to thee, How
great thou art! How great thou art! Then sings
my soul, my Savior God, to thee, How great thou
art! How great thou art!

When through the woods and forest glades I
wander/ Consider the birds sing sweetly in the
trees; When I look down from lofty mountain
grandeur/ And hear the brook and feel the
gentle breeze.

Then sings my soul, my Savior God, to thee, How
great thou art! How great thou art! Then sings
my soul, my Savior God, to thee, How great thou
art! How great thou art!”

Lutheran Book of Worship, Hymn # 532, “How Great Thou Art”

About the Author:

Rev. Samer Azar is the Pastor of the Evangelical Lutheran Good Shepherd Church in Amman-Jordan since 1996, and the representative of the Lutheran Church in Jordan. He obtained his Theological Education at Makumira Lutheran Theological Seminary in Tanzania in 1995 as the first student from the Middle East to enroll in the five years Bachelor of Divinity program (MDV American Standard). Rev. Azar was ordained in Sept 6, 1996 in Jerusalem at the Evangelical Lutheran Church of the Redeemer in Jerusalem. He was then appointed to pastor and led the Good Shepherd Church in Amman/ Jordan. Rev. Azar is active in the ecumenical circles and in the Christian-Moslem Dialogue. He established the Community Ecumenical Centre (Al Khaimeh), a platform that promotes harmony,

coexistence, dialogue and moderation through various activities conducted at the Centre. He was recently elected as the Synod President of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land (ELCJHL). Rev. Azar also serves as a member of the Administrative Committee of the Bible Society of Jordan; a member of the Board of Schneller School in Amman belonging to the Anglican Church; and a member of the General Committee of the Department Service for Palestinian Refugees (DSPR/MECC).

SPIRITUAL LESSONS FROM THE JORDAN RIVER

Rabbi Yonatan Neril¹

In recent decades, the lower Jordan River has declined precipitously. The approximately 20 million people now living in Israel, the Palestinian Authority, Syria, and Jordan draw on the waters that feed the lower Jordan for household, agricultural, and industrial uses. Deprived of its normal freshwater flow, the lower Jordan has become polluted and degraded, and its biodiversity has diminished significantly. Yet the physical state of the Jordan River points to a deeper spiritual challenge facing those living in the Holy Land as well as all of humanity. It reflects the spiritual state of the human society that surrounds it and is meant to be its steward.

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks provides an important insight into the difference between the Dead Sea and the Sea of Galilee, the only two enclosed bodies of water in the Holy Land. He notes that “the latter is full of life: fish, birds, vegetation. The former, as its name suggests, contains no life at all. Yet they are both fed by the same river, the Jordan. The difference, he said, is that the Sea of Galilee receives water at one end and gives out water at the other. The Dead Sea receives but does not give. The Jordan ends there. To receive without reciprocating is a kind of death. To live is to give.”²

In our times, until 2014, humans have prevented the Sea of Galilee from releasing freshwater to the lower Jordan River. This reflects a taker society, one that takes much of the freshwater for itself and does not leave it for others. The taking became so intense that the Sea of Galilee neared the ‘black line’ in 2012, which is the level below which this freshwater sea could permanently become a salt sea, like the Dead Sea.

Taking Without Really Knowing It

Today, the industrialization of water distribution has increased the availability of water yet reduced our appreciation of its importance. We generally do not see where food is grown or the rain or irrigation that waters the crops. In Israel, for example, the National Water Carrier distributing water from the Kinneret (Sea of Galilee) and electric pumping of the underground aquifers has enabled irrigation of most Israeli farmland, increasing crop yields. Most recently, desalinization of Mediterranean seawater is becoming an increasing source of freshwater to fulfill increasing demand and to make up for expected future decrease supply from these other sources. (However, desalinization requires a significant amount of energy to produce the water, and thus contributes to climate change and air pollution.) Throughout the world, irrigation through electric pumping of water has transformed crop production. For households, piped water now comes directly to us, replacing reliance on local water sources.

These innovations have relieved us from transporting water from streams and cisterns to our homes. While this represents a tremendous improvement in quality of life, it also blinds us to where water comes from - both physically and spiritually. With this, we have lost the deep-seated experience of the preciousness of water. For many, this is partly a spiritual loss: lacking the sense of our ultimate dependence on G-d for all our needs. But it also has very significant practical impacts, because where appreciation ends, misuse begins. Much of the water that used to flow into the lower Jordan is now used in toilets and for agriculture, some of which is exported abroad. Most people are not aware that by consuming water as a ‘normal modern consumer’—using flush toilets, taking showers often, consuming meat (which requires more

¹ This article draws on some text written by the author that was produced and published as part of the Jewcology project.

² *To Heal a Fractured World*, Continuum Books: London, page 41

water to produce)—they are contributing to the depletion of the Sea of Galilee, the lower Jordan River, the Dead Sea, and the underground aquifers.

Those who care about the Jordan will influence its fate

The Jordan River is significant for Muslims, Christians, and Jews. Imam Zaid Shakir, in his article “Islam, Muslims, and the Jordan River,” explains the rich connection of the Jordan River to Muslims.³ Of note to Jews and Christians, the book of Genesis compares the Jordan River to “the garden of God,” alluding to its lushness and beauty. Jews, Christians, and Muslims associate holiness with the land west of the Jordan River. It therefore needs to be treated as such, including in the way that its natural environment is stewarded.

Common environmental challenges and the responsibility for stewardship among people across faiths can help bring people together. When that happens, faith communities working together have leverage to influence people and governments. We need to work together in a whole new way in order to rehabilitate the Jordan, as well as the earth itself.

The fate of the Jordan River, the Sea of Galilee, and Dead Sea are in our hands, along with all other streams in Israel, and the mountain and coastal aquifers. Will they go the way of the Dead Sea, which suffers from the takers syndrome? Or will they be like the Sea of Galilee, receiving from a higher source and then giving?

The state of the Jordan River can help cultivate within us greater mindfulness and inspire us to move away from a ‘taker mentality.’ Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzatto (the Ramchal) taught that God is the ultimate giver, and that we should emulate the ways of God by being givers ourselves. Water in Kabbalistic teachings symbolizes consciousness, and so the Jordan River is an appropriate teacher of humanity’s need to

broaden its spiritual awareness and become net givers. Doing so will help us shift from a path leading to degradation to a path that encourages and supports life.

About the Author:

Rabbi Yonatan Neril founded and directs the Interfaith Center for Sustainable Development (www.interfaithsustain.com). He completed an M.A. and B.A. from Stanford University with a focus on global environmental issues, and received rabbinical ordination in Israel. He has spoken internationally on religion and the environment, and organized two interfaith environmental conferences in Jerusalem in which religious leaders of several faiths spoke. He is the lead author and general editor of two publications on Jewish environmental ethics including *Uplifting People and Planet: 18 Essential Jewish Teachings on the Environment* and was a Dorot and Presentense Fellow. He lives with his wife, Shana, and two children in Jerusalem.

³ Published in Friends of the Earth Middle East sourcebook on the Jordan River and Islam, 2014

JORDAN RIVER: RELIGIOUS SIGNIFICANCE

Amer Kanan, Environment and Earth Sciences Department, Al-Quds University, Palestine

Rivers are considered valuable and with special importance since they play different roles in human life. Fresh water is circulated through rivers; unique ecosystems are supported by rivers; and rivers are rich repositories for cultural and religious heritages. Haberman (2006) indicated that a river's environmental degrading also challenges religious frameworks. The current Jordan River degradation involves a religious crisis in addition to the ecological one. Like many rivers all over the world, the Jordan River has its own and even unique environmental, symbolic, and sociopolitical importance and value. The Jordan River is flowing in an arid but irrigated agricultural area; many urban and engineering projects are taking place in the Jordan River but with less respect to its religious echo. A complex and unusual political situation between Jordan River riparian states and lack of institutional authority between Jordan, Palestine and Israel has affected the Jordan River negatively.

Jordan River value and symbolism is not only due to its environmental and sociopolitical importance and status, but also its impressive wider cultural and religious significance.

The Jordan River was described briefly in the Hebrew Bible "well-watered everywhere, like the garden of the lord" (Genesis 13:10). The Jordan River is mentioned in about eighty contexts in the Hebrew Bible. Many phrases talk about Jewish symbols crossed and traversed the river that considered conferring an authoritative status and a personal transformation (Hutton, 2009). According to the Old Testament Moses viewed the Promised Land from Mount Nebo before his death. In Deuteronomy 34:1 this mountain was mentioned by name: "Then Moses climbed Mount Nebo from the plains of Moab to the top of Pisgah, across from Jericho. There the Lord showed him the whole land – from Gilead to Dan".

According to Christian tradition Mount Nebo (Jabal al-Siyyagha) is the mountain mentioned in the Bible. The site is also traditionally believed to be the site where Moses was buried.

The Jordan River is well known and personified in Christian liturgies. The Jordan River is referred to in 11 sites in the New Testament especially the baptism of Jesus by John and identifying him by God as "my Son, the beloved". The Jordan River is a destination for eastern and western Christian pilgrims seeking baptism, considering its water blessed. The Jordan River is ultimately the river where the ministry of Jesus said to have begun. The Vatican in 2000 recognized the Baptism Site, Mount Nebo, Our Lady of the Mountain, and the shrines of Mar Elijah and Mukawir as holy sites and as pilgrimage places. The site of Our Lady of the Mount is believed to be a town which is mentioned in the Bible and it is believed that Jesus, his mother Mary and his disciples passed and rested in a nearby cave.

The Baptism Site (or al-Maghtas) is a unique site because it is considered by many Christians to have been the birth-place of Christianity. Mukawir (Machaerus) is the site of the Herodian fortress where according to tradition John the Baptist was imprisoned and beheaded. Christians believe that Tal Mar Elias was formerly Tishbi, the home of Elijah, a native of Gilead. The belief that the site has a long association with Christian hagiography is substantiated by the two churches that were built on the Tal in the late Byzantine period.

For Muslims there are eight popular Islamic pilgrimage sites in Jordan: the Shrine of Abu Ubaydah Amir ibn al-Jarrah, the Shrine of Dirar bin al-Azwar, the Shrine of Shurhabil bin Hus-nah, the Shrine of Amir bin AbiWaqgas, the Shrine of Zaid bin Harithah, the Shrine of Ja'far bin Abi Taleb, and the Shrine of Abdallah bin Rawahah. These sites are mainly visited on

Fridays. The Shrine of Abu Ubaydah Amir ibn al-Jarrah (located in the Jordan Valley) hosts a modern mosque which embraces a much older tomb attributed to the great companion Abu Ubaydah, famous in Islamic history. The shrine of Mu'ath bin Jabal is located in the town of North Shunah and consists of a building surmounted by five domes dating to the Turkish period. It includes a tomb believed in tradition to be that of Mu'ath bin Jabal, and another shrine to his son. The shrine of Shurahbil ibn Hasanah in the Jordan valley where a modern mosque has been built to encompass the ancient tomb attributed to Sharhabil bin Hasanah. The shrine of Amir Ibn Abi Waqqas is in the town of Waqqas in the northern Jordan Valley, 15 km from the shrine of the Companion Shurahbil ibn Husna. Amir bin Abi Waqqas was the maternal cousin of the Prophet and brother of Sa'ad bin Abi Waqqas. The shrine of Dirar bin al-Azwar is in the Jordan Valley in the town of Deir Alla, which is about 5 km from the shrine of Abu Ubaydah. Dirar ibn al-Azwar was one of the early companions of the Prophet Muhammad. He is remembered as a wild and fierce warrior who loved combat. The shrine of Ja'far bin Abi Taleb is in the town of al-Mazar in al-Karak governorate. Inside a large mosque built recently the tomb of the great Companion Ja'far ibn Abi Taleb, who was second in command at the Battle of Mu'tah. He is especially revered by Shi'a Muslims because he is the brother of Imam Ali bin Abi Taleb. The shrine of Zaid ibn al-Harithah is on the same site as the shrine of Ja'far bin Abi Taleb. Zaid bin Harithah was an early convert to Islam and later a military leader. He was a prominent figure in the early Islamic community and the only one of Sahaba whose name is explicitly mentioned in the Qur'an. He died at the Battle of Mu'tah. Makam Abdullah bin Rawahah is located in the town of al-Mazar in al-Karak governorate. Inside the holy site is the tomb attributed to the great Companion Abdallah bin Rawahah, who was the third in command at the Battle of Mu'tah. Makam Abdullah bin Rawahah is also al-Mazar. Inside the holy site is the tomb attributed to the great Companion Abdallah bin Rawahah, who was the third in command at the Battle of Mu'tah.

The land around the Jordan River Valley is revered as blessed by Muslims, Christians and Jews. It is referred to as "the Garden of the Lord" in the Old Testament, and in the Quran it is claimed that God blessed the land "for all beings". Almost half of humanity views the land and the river of Jordan as the geographic and spiritual heartland of their faith. There are over 40 Islamic sites pertaining to the Companions of the Prophet Muhammad who were martyred and buried in Jordan and over 100 Christian sites mentioned in the Bible by name that lie within the Jordan Valley (Piccirillo et al., 1999).

About the Author:

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SELECTED RELIGIOUS TEXT EXCERPTS ABOUT ECOLOGY, WATER AND THE JORDAN RIVER:

FROM THE JEWISH TRADITION

From the Tanakh:

'...with my staff alone I crossed this Jordan...'

Then Jacob said, "O God of my father Abraham and God of my father Isaac, O LORD, who said to me, 'Return to your native land and I will deal bountifully with you'! I am unworthy of all the kindness that You have so steadfastly shown Your servant: with my staff alone I crossed this Jordan, and now I have become two camps.

Genesis 32:10-11

'The water has remained wholesome to this day...'

When the LORD was about to take Elijah up to heaven in a whirlwind, Elijah and Elisha had set out from Gilgal.

Elijah said to Elisha, "Stay here, for the LORD has sent me on to Bethel." "As the LORD lives and as you live," said Elisha, "I will not leave you." So they went down to Bethel.

Disciples of the prophets at Bethel came out to Elisha and said to him, "Do you know that the LORD will take your master away from you today?" He replied, "I know it, too; be silent."

Then Elijah said to him, "Elisha, stay here, for the LORD has sent me on to Jericho." "As the LORD lives and as you live," said Elisha, "I will not leave you." So they went on to Jericho.

The disciples of the prophets who were at Jericho came over to Elisha and said to him, "Do you know that the LORD will take your master away from you today?" He replied, "I know it, too; be silent."
Elijah said to him, "Stay here, for the LORD has sent me on to the Jordan." "As the LORD lives

and as you live, I will not leave you," he said, and the two of them went on.

Fifty men of the disciples of the prophets followed and stood by at a distance from them as the two of them stopped at the Jordan. Thereupon Elijah took his mantle and, rolling it up, he struck the water; it divided to the right and left, so that the two of them crossed over on dry land.

As they were crossing, Elijah said to Elisha, "Tell me, what can I do for you before I am taken from you?" Elisha answered, "Let a double portion of your spirit pass on to me."

"You have asked a difficult thing," he said. "If you see me as I am being taken from you, this will be granted to you; if not, it will not."

As they kept on walking and talking, a fiery chariot with fiery horses suddenly appeared and separated one from the other; and Elijah went up to heaven in a whirlwind.

Elisha saw it, and he cried out, "Oh, father, father! Israel's chariots and horsemen!" When he could no longer see him, he grasped his garments and rent them in two.

He picked up Elijah's mantle, which had dropped from him; and he went back and stood on the bank of the Jordan.

Taking the mantle which had dropped from Elijah, he struck the water and said, "Where is the LORD, the God of Elijah?" As he too struck the water, it parted to the right and to the left, and Elisha crossed over.

When the disciples of the prophets at Jericho saw him from a distance, they exclaimed, "The spirit of Elijah has settled on Elisha!" And they went to meet him and bowed low before him to the ground.

They said to him, "Your servants have fifty able men with them. Let them go and look for your master; perhaps the spirit of the LORD has carried him off and cast him upon some

mountain or into some valley.” “Do not send them,” he replied.

But they kept pressing him for a long time, until he said, “Send them.” So they sent out fifty men, who searched for three days but did not find him.

They came back to him while he was still in Jericho; and he said to them, “I told you not to go.”

The men of the town said to Elisha, “Look, the town is a pleasant place to live in, as my lord can see; but the water is bad and the land causes bereavement.”

He responded, “Bring me a new dish and put salt in it.” They brought it to him;

he went to the spring and threw salt into it. And he said, “Thus said the LORD: I heal this water; no longer shall death and bereavement come from it!”

The water has remained wholesome to this day, in accordance with the word spoken by Elisha.

2 Kings 2:1-22

From the Midrash (Jewish Thought)

On the care of creation...

When God created the first human beings, God led them around the Garden of Eden and said: ‘Look at my works! See how beautiful they are—how excellent! For your sake I created them all. See to it that you do not spoil and destroy My world; for if you do, there will be no one else to repair it.’

Midrash Kohelet Rabbah

FROM THE CHRISTIAN TRADITION

The Jordan River in the Gospels – The Baptism of Jesus

John replied in the words of Isaiah the prophet, “I am the voice of one calling in the wilderness, ‘Make straight the way for the Lord.’”

John, 1:23

As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like

a dove and alighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, “This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.”

Matthew 3:16-17

Now when all the people were baptized, it came to pass, that Jesus also being baptized, and praying, the heaven was opened, And the Holy Ghost descended in a bodily shape like a dove upon him, and a voice came from heaven, which said, Thou art my beloved Son; in thee I am well pleased.

Luke 3:21-22

FROM THE MUSLIM TRADITION

Water in the Holy Quran On water, rain, and life...

And Allah has sent down rain from the sky and given life thereby to the earth after its lifelessness. Indeed in that is a sign for a people who listen.

Quran 16:65

On man’s Vice-Regency (Khilafah) and care for the earth...

And [mention, O Muhammad], when your Lord said to the angels, “Indeed, I will make upon the earth a successive authority.” They said, “Will you place upon it one who causes corruption therein and sheds blood, while we declare Your praise and sanctify You?” Allah said, “Indeed, I know that which you do not know.”

Quran 2:30

Care for the Earth in Hadith and Sunna

Verily, this world is sweet and appealing, and Allah placed you as vicegerents therein; He will see what you will do.

**Sahih Muslim, Musnad Ahmad Bin Hanbal
(Chapter 3, page 22)**

PRAYERS AND OTHER WRITINGS

FROM THE JEWISH TRADITION

A prayer of praise for creation...

Praised are You, Our God, Ruler of the universe, former of light, creator of darkness, maker of peace and the creator of all things. In Your mercy light shines over the earth and upon all who inhabit it. Through your goodness the work of the creation is daily renewed. How great are Your works, O God, in wisdom You have made all of them. The earth is filled with your creations.

Daily Prayer, Siddur Amidah, Yotzer Or (Former of Light)

FROM THE CHRISTIAN TRADITION

PRAISED BE YOU MY LORD, THROUGH SISTER WATER...

Most High, all-powerful, all-good Lord,
All praise is Yours, all glory, all honour and all blessings.
To you alone, Most High, do they belong,
and no mortal lips are worthy to pronounce Your Name.
Praised be You my Lord with all Your creatures,
especially Sir Brother Sun,
Who is the day through whom You give us light.
And he is beautiful and radiant with great splendour,
Of You Most High, he bears the likeness.
Praised be You, my Lord, through Sister Moon
and the stars,
In the heavens you have made them bright,
precious and fair.
Praised be You, my Lord, through Brothers Wind
and Air,
And fair and stormy, all weather's moods,
by which You cherish all that You have made.
Praised be You my Lord through Sister Water,
So useful, humble, precious and pure.
Praised be You my Lord through Brother Fire,

through whom You light the night
and he is beautiful and playful and robust and strong.

Praised be You my Lord through our Sister,
Mother Earth

who sustains and governs us,
producing varied fruits with coloured flowers
and herbs.

Praise be You my Lord through those who grant
pardon

for love of You and bear sickness and trial.

Blessed are those who endure in peace,

By You Most High, they will be crowned.

Praised be You, my Lord through Sister Death,
from whom no-one living can escape.

Woe to those who die in mortal sin!

Blessed are they She finds doing Your Will.

No second death can do them harm.

Praise and bless my Lord and give Him thanks,
And serve Him with great humility.

Saint Francis of Assisi (1181 – 1226), Canticle of the Sun

The Jordan River has a particular place in the Christian songbook, and especially in the spiritual and gospel music of the American South.

'Crossing the Jordan' is a metaphor for passing over the threshold that divides this life from the heavenly paradise beyond. Again and again, it is used as a symbol of home-coming and peace at the end of life's journey. But for the slaves who first sang these songs, 'going over Jordan' had another, more subversive meaning: escaping into freedom, just as the Jews had crossed the river and gained the promised land after long years of slavery in Egypt and wandering in the wilderness.

FROM THE MUSLIM TRADITION

All the natural resources in this world are trusts, and it is the religious duty of Muslims to take care of these sources and use them in a sustainable manner. The Jordan River is included.

Prof. Mustafa Abu Sway, Al Aqsa Mosque & Al Quds University

We are God's stewards and agents on Earth. We are not masters of this Earth; it does not belong to us to do what we wish. It belongs to God and He has entrusted us with its safekeeping.

Dr. Abdullah Omar Nasseef, Secretary General, Muslim World League, Muslim declaration on Nature, Assisi, 1976

The Arabic word for water, ma, occurs sixty-three times in the Quran. God's throne is described as resting on water, and Paradise is described as "Gardens beneath which rivers flow." As Caponera points out, it seems that in the Quran, the most precious creation after humankind is water. The life-giving quality of water is reflected in the verse, "And Allah has sent down the water from the sky and therewith gives life to the earth after its death." Not only does water give life, but every life is itself made of water: "We made from water every living thing."

Naser I. Faruqui, Director of Science & Innovation, International Development Research Center

FAITH-BASED DECLARATIONS ON THE ENVIRONMENT AND ONLINE RESOURCES FOR IN-DEPTH STUDY

The Assisi Declarations: Messages on Humanity and Nature from Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam & Judaism

<http://www.arcworld.org/downloads/THE%20ASSISI%20DECLARATIONS.pdf>

Earth and Faith: a Book of Reflection for Action
United Nations Environment Programme

<http://www.unep.org/newyork/EarthandFaithBook/tabid/56218/Default.aspx>

Muslim declaration on environment

<http://www.arcworld.org/faiths.asp?pageID=75>

Muslim declaration on Nature:

<http://www.arcworld.org/faiths.asp?pageID=132>

Islam and water (cartoon)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S2tDhldp2fw>

Islam and Water

The Hajjar (r.a.) Story and Guide

<http://www.arcworld.org/downloads/Hajjar%20Story.pdf>

<http://www.arcworld.org/projects.asp?projectID=558>

Islamic Foundation for Ecology and Environmental Sciences

<http://www.ifees.org.uk/resources-papers-and-essays>

A Common Declaration on the Environment
International Catholic-Jewish Liaison Committee

<http://www.ccsr.us/dialogika-resources/documents-and-statements/interreligious/ilc/1067-ilc1998-environment>

Faith in Conservation - New Approaches to Religions and the Environment (World Bank)

<http://www.arcworld.org/downloads/Faith-in-Conservation-2013.pdf>

Statements on Religion and Ecology from Religious Organizations
The Forum on Religion and Ecology at Yale

<http://fore.research.yale.edu/publications/statements/>

Peace with God the creator, peace with all of creation

Message of His Holiness Pope John Paul II
World Day of Peace, 1 January 1990

http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/messages/peace/documents/hf_jp-ii_mes_19891208_xxiii-world-day-for-peace_en.html

Message on the Day of Prayer for Creation
His All-Holiness the Ecumenical Patriarch Dimitrios

1 September 1989

<http://www.goarch.org/ourfaith/ourfaith8052>

On the Care of Creation

An Evangelical Declaration on Ecology

By the Evangelical Environmental Network

<http://www.creationcare.org/blank.php?id=39>

Water and Sukkot

By Rabbi Jacob Elisha Fine in the Huffington Post

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/rabbi-jacob-elisha-fine/prayer-for-rain-sukkot_b_1939327.html



III. EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES

The following section aims to provide ideas for using the Water, Ecology, and the Jordan River in the Abrahamic Traditions sourcebook in your community. As an educator, a religious or youth group leader, or as a volunteer helping your community coordinate an event or class that focuses on the Jordan River, this section offers topics, ideas and resources to discuss and easily adapt to your community and the participants in your program.

The ideas outlined here are designed for use in any number of venues - the classroom, in nature, as the focus of a community or youth event. This toolkit can be used to facilitate group learning and build inter-community efforts, and is most suitable for informal educational settings.

The goal of the program is for participants to gain an understanding of the Jordan River's significance to their personal religious identity and to other traditions, to learn about the Jordan

River's current condition, and to consider the physical, spiritual, historical, and other impacts of the river's demise. Participants will learn what they personally can do to help save the river and be inspired to participate in community-sponsored efforts to promote the Jordan River's rehabilitation while working together in a multi-faith group setting, and thus increasing tolerance and understanding between traditions.

Suggested topics, sources and ideas for discussion or group discussions for multi-faith communities:

- How does your tradition relate to the concept of water as a symbol of purity? What are the common points and differences in the different traditions? What religious practices do we still follow nowadays related to water? In which additional ways could we honor the respect of water in the 21st century?
- Why is there conflict over water? What is the connection between the peace process in the Middle East and water issues, and how you think this should be handle? How do you expect these issues to change in the future?
- What does it mean to be the guardian or vice-regent of Earth in your tradition? Which holidays are related to protecting the environment and /or to water? In what ways should we act in the 21st century to live up to this position?
- How does the Jordan River differ from the state it was in ancient times? What should be done to restore it? What are the main obstacles in the way? Who has right to the water of the Jordan River? How do you think these will change in the near future?
- What does the Jordan River symbolize for you? Why should faith-based groups care about saving the Jordan? How can multi-faith communities help?

Times and seasons, important days about the Jordan River, water and ecology over the year

Multi-faith calendar for the current year can be found on the homepage or the Harvard Divinity School:

<http://hds.harvard.edu/life-at-hds/religious-and-spiritual-life/multifaith-calendar>

- Early January: Baptism of Lord (Christian)
- March 14: International Day of Action for Rivers
- March 22: World Water Day
- April 22: Earth Day
- Late September - Late October: Sukkot and Shmini Atzeret, with Prayer for Rain (Jewish)
- Eid al-Adha, Feast of the Sacrifice (Muslim): Hagar, Abraham's wife miraculously finds water. (date on the Gregorian calendar varies)



IV. IDEAS FOR ACTION

Reviving the Jordan River will not be easy. It is a challenge that requires real political commitment from leaders on all sides of the valley.

And that's where you come in.

We need to push this issue up the political agenda – to raise our voices and let Israeli, Palestinian, Jordanian and international decision-makers know that we care about this river and expect them to act.

The Jordan River flows through the heart of the Christian, Muslim and Jewish tradition, and for that reason its revival is a not simply a question of politics – it is also a moral and spiritual challenge for believers around the world. The Jordan River belongs to us all. If we want it to survive, we cannot remain silent.

HOW TO JOIN THE CAMPAIGN

- **Sign the Covenant for the Jordan River.** The Covenant is a vision statement articulating the Jordan River's outstanding value to humanity. Endorsing the covenant demonstrates commitment to champion the rehabilitation of the Jordan in one's communities and vis-a-vis the world's decision makers. Join congregations and leaders around the world by endorsing the Covenant for the Jordan River as an individual or community. You'll find the text of the Covenant on the inside cover of this document.
- **Get together.** Establish a circle of friends, classmates, or co-workers from your community. You might be a group of three or three hundred. It doesn't matter. Together, you can make a difference.
- **Get inspired.** When you've got a group, you need to tell them what happened to the river,



why it matters, and what they can do about it. EcoPeace Middle East can provide films, presentations, and fact sheets to help you tell this story.

- **Identify your target.** You need to let decision-makers know that you care about the river and want them to act. It is crucial to address this message to the right person. If you're in one of the countries that border the river, it might be a mayor or minister. If you're part of a religious congregation, it might be the most senior representative of your community. If you're outside the Middle East, you might need to address your elected representatives, or the national ambassadors from the countries that share the river. You are in the best position to make this call. Discuss it with your group, and come up with the names and addresses of the political, religious, or civil society leaders you are going to approach.
- **Get the message across.** When you know what you want to say and who you want to say it to, you need to decide how to get the message across.

IDEAS FOR ACTION

Write

Old-fashioned paper mail is more effective than email, and personal, hand-written letters tend to make more impact. Pictures, poems and postcards can all help your letter to stand out. On our website you'll find sample letters, fact sheets, and stories to help you make the case.

Meet

Why not invite your representative or leader to a meeting, so s/he can learn more about the issue and start to work with you on the campaign?

Get noticed

Organize a creative, peaceful, attention-grabbing stunt to bring the Jordan River to the attention of political leaders. Remember to invite the local media, and to get your message as clear as possible. EcoPeace Middle East has used this strategy to great effect in the Middle East – you are welcome to contact us for ideas and advice.

Learn, create, exhibit

If you are a schoolteacher or faith leader, you may want to design an educational project about



the river. This could produce paintings, poems, songs, films, or photos that you can exhibit to raise awareness about the state of the Jordan. Think about which religious or political leaders – as well as which media outlets – you could invite to such an event. A module of this kind not only raises environmental consciousness; it can also offer young people an education in global citizenship, grassroots activism, and participation in the democratic process.

Use your imagination

These are not the only ways to raise awareness about the state of the Jordan River. Use your imagination. Make some noise. And keep it positive – you’ll be more effective if you address political leaders as partners, and ask them to join you in this effort, rather than treating them as an obstacle.

OTHER WAYS TO HELP

- **Spread the word.** Use your social networks to call for the revival of the Jordan River. Let people know what the problem is, why you care, and what you’re doing to help. On our website you’ll find videos, photos, and even sample posts to help get the word out – *but your own voice is the most powerful*. Please tell us what you’re doing via Twitter and Facebook – it helps us build momentum behind the campaign.
- **Invite EcoPeace Middle East to speak to your community.** Get in touch if you would like someone from EcoPeace Middle East to speak to your community about the Jordan River.
- **Come to the River.** If you want to get more deeply involved, organize a journey to see the Jordan River for yourself. EcoPeace Middle East runs tours and EcoParks – ideal places to stay and to learn – on both sides of the valley. A journey like this will equip you with first-hand knowledge that you can use to advocate for the river in your home community. We can also put you in touch with tour operators and local partners (including environmental and faith groups) that’ll help make your trip safe and successful.
- **Donate.** We need your financial support to continue this effort. You can donate online at www.ecopeaceme.org or, better still, use your local campaign to raise funds.



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V. NOTE ON TERMINOLOGY

Regional Terminology and Abbreviations

The challenges of geo-historical terminology are particularly serious, since no single geographical name applies to all periods and to the same extent of land including the area of modern Israel, Palestine, and Jordan. Therefore, we have used the general term “region” when referring to the whole area of Israel, Palestine and Jordan. Where names have been used the local term in Arabic and/or Hebrew has been applied, while the English has acknowledged alternative names if they exist in different forms. In the case of the Lake Tiberias/Kinneret/Sea of Galilee we have utilized ‘Sea of Galilee’ for simplicity purposes as all three names are accepted in the scientific literature.

Furthermore, in the case of English spellings of place names we have tried to select the most common spellings.

SAAS: “May Allāh honor him and grant him peace.”: (Arabic: صلى الله عليه وسلم Salla Allāhu Aalay-hi wa-sallam) – is a salutation Muslims say after uttering the name of the prophet Muhammad.

VI. CREDITS

A NOTE ON TRANSLATIONS

All English-language translations are taken from the Sahih International edition of the Holy Quran.

All English-language translations of the Bible, Old and New Testaments, are taken from the King James Bible, with the exception of the quote on the front cover (Ezekiel 47:6) which comes from the English Standard version.

All English-language excerpts from the Tanakh are taken from the New Jewish Publication Society (JPS) Bible (1985).

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The views expressed are those of EcoPeace Middle East and do not necessarily represent the views of our expert team, contributors, project advisors or reviewers.

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ABOUT ECOPEACE MIDDLE EAST

EcoPeace Middle East is a unique organization at the forefront of the environmental peacemaking movement. As a tri-lateral organization that brings together Jordanian, Palestinian, and Israeli environmentalists, our primary objective is the promotion of cooperative efforts to protect our shared environmental heritage. In so doing, we seek to advance both sustainable regional development and the creation of necessary conditions for lasting peace in our region. EcoPeace Middle East has offices in Amman, Bethlehem, and Tel-Aviv.

For more information on EcoPeace Middle East or to download any of our publications please visit: www.ecopeaceme.org

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