

making judgment and taking action.

Think about the three Rs—Reduce, Reuse, Recycle—in that order of importance. Begin by making small changes. Ask yourself: *Will I start recycling? Composting? Carpooling? Riding my bike more? Growing herbs?* You'll be amazed at how small changes can start a domino effect.

Alex: Rabbi Hillel's adage, "If I am not for myself, who am I? If I am only for myself, what am I? And if not now, when?" perfectly applies to our choices as consumers:

"If I am not for myself...": I am entitled to take my share in this world.

"If I am only for myself...": If I take more than my share, I am out of balance with what the world can give.

"And if not now, when?": I will start now, because my every action affects someone else. Maybe I can afford to leave the lights on, but that means I'm telling the electric company to burn more coal, pollute more air, and harm more people and animals. Here in Israel, 1,600 people die each year from industrial, electrical, and vehicle exhaust-related air pollution.

So, the next time I shop, I won't take

the plastic bag; I'll pack groceries in my backpack. Before going to bed, I'll pull the plugs or turn off the power strip on all electronic appliances, because they use electricity even when they're not in use. I'll put a bucket in the shower and use the saved water to water my plants. And when the time comes to renovate my house, office, or synagogue, I'll use the healthiest, most environmentally friendly materials I can find to conserve energy.

Given the magnitude of the world's environmental ills, it may seem to many that what's being proposed here is but a "drop in the bucket"—hardly worth the trouble.

Alex: From a permaculture perspective, we each need to take one step at a time with no preconditions as to the final outcome. From a Jewish perspective, Rabbi Tarfon addressed the concern regarding confronting a seemingly insurmountable challenge when he said: "It's not up to you to complete the task, but neither are you free to desist from it."

Am I already practicing permaculture if I grow food in my own organic garden?

Leah: Organic gardening addresses food production, which is only part of the whole. Permaculture takes into account the entire "ecological footprint" of the food cycle—tracing it along its path from production to consumption—where the initial inputs (seeds, fertilizers, soil amendments, water) come from, where it's produced, how it gets to the consumer, and what happens to any waste along the way.

What permaculture gardening practices do you recommend?

Leah: In permaculture we talk about reducing waste by making sure that every single component in a system serves at

“According to the Caring for the

least three different purposes. So, for example, if you join with others in growing fruits, vegetables, and herbs, the three benefits might be: 1) increasing awareness of what produce looks and tastes like straight from the earth; 2) discovering as a community the world beneath the soil; and 3) experiencing the empowering feeling of planting a seed and later harvesting an ear of corn or a head of broccoli.

What common gardening mistakes might we avoid?

Leah: A common mistake is thinking that this adventure is not going to include a lot of hard work. Gardeners need to weed; to keep plants irrigated (you can place natural mulch over the soil, such as dried leaves or straw, which among other things prevents the soil from drying out); and to provide for their nutrition (you can mix in compost made from discarded garden and kitchen waste, which provides nutrients and improves soil texture).

Alex: The biggest mistake is giving up when you don't succeed. Sometimes things

Courses in Creative Ecology

Kibbutz Lotan's Center for Creative Ecology offers:

1 The Peace, Justice & the Environment Fall Semester in Israel, a 16-credit college program for 14 students, accredited through U Mass Amherst, which teaches Social Justice, Group Dynamics, Sustainable Agriculture and Design.

2 The Green Apprenticeship Practical Ecology Training Program, an intensive seven-week work/study permaculture experience: Students learn local food production, organic gardening, ecological design techniques, natural and alternative building, sustainable technologies, community design, and environmental ethics while living in a unique eco-neighborhood—a prototype model for sustainable living.

3 Jewish Community and Practical Environmental Education Seminars specifically designed for Reform congregational and youth group trips to Israel.

For detailed information please visit www.kibbutzlotan.com or www.rjisrael.org, or email kibbutzlotan@gmail.com.



Seminar participants Ariel (a Venezuelan-Israeli gardener) and Frederick (an agro-engineer from Cameroon) produce sun-dried bricks. The same recipe the Children of Israel used to make mud bricks while in Egypt is applied today in the fabrication of carbon neutral walls, modern furniture, and pizza ovens.

ALL PHOTOS COURTESY OF THE KIBBUTZ LOTAN CENTER FOR CREATIVE ECOLOGY