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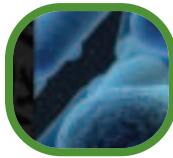
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Water: Essential to Life!



**The Waters Before Creation, Or:  
Drawing Spiritual Insights from a Rock**  
*by Benjamin Friedman, Adamah Fellow*

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**Israeli Technology Can Help Clean the Gulf Oil Spill**  
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# *The Waters Before Creation, Or: Drawing Spiritual Insights from a Rock*

By Benjamin Friedman

While sitting on a rock by the Manhattan-side bank of the Hudson River, I watch as a pale curtain of fog rolls across the waters. And I wait. I am waiting to be moved by some kind of spiritual insight, or deep, powerful emotion; to feel a connection to the great swaying liquid before me. But so far nothing inspiring has emerged.

Feeling uninspired, uncreative, and cynical, I have come to the edge of these waters to reflect upon the spiritual nature of water for an article I am writing. What does water mean to me as a human being? As a spiritual being? And as a young Jewish writer?

*What does water mean to me  
as a human being?*

I want a powerful spiritual experience; I want a great blaze of creativity kindled within me. But nothing

is revealing itself. As a writer, I know the repercussions of trying to force my creativity. Chaos and confusion come. And so...I must...be...patient. After all, even gentle drops of water can wear down and break apart the greatest of boulders. It just takes a very long time and a lot of drips to do so.

Plus, I've only been on this rock for fifteen minutes.

So there I am, breathing in the heavy air, peering briefly across the channel at the dotted edge of New Jersey, when suddenly I do indeed have a flash of...something. Not words in my head or a vision in my mind, just a slight ripple of a memory I cannot place with a splash of feelings I cannot express. I am not sure what this is. But I know it calms me, and makes me feel more at one with the rocking gray waters before me. And as I continue gazing out at the river this scene reminds me of something...

The first book of the Torah, in the very first chapter of Genesis.

*"Now the earth was astonishingly empty, and darkness was on the face of the deep, and the spirit of G-d was hovering over the face of the water"*  
(Genesis, Chapter 1, Verse 2)

With my mind as "astonishingly empty" as it could be, I had stumbled upon the waters before Creation.

And suddenly, things began to flow.

continued

*Click here to listen: Moshav Band singing Bereishit*

I realize that there is a parallel between the story of Creation and any act of creativity. Before the artist or builder, there is nothing but a vast ocean of possibility – formless, shapeless, and often fathomless. But then, somehow, almost miraculously, coherent thoughts take form and grow into reality. Like the Waters before Creation, it takes a spirit moving over the depths of the mind (inspiration!) for this miracle to occur.

Something happens when we close our eyes for a minute and meditate on the dark shifting colors projected on our inner eyelids. Give it a try. Clear your mind. Then, wait for an image to materialize in the darkness. Take as much time as you need.

What do you see – a tree in a meadow? A bicycle parked outside a barber-shop? A loved one's face smiling back at you? Where does this image come from? How and why is a chaotic blur of darkness suddenly transformed into something living and meaningful to you? It is the most common of events - yet what a miracle! We are given

*Hashem creating and re-creating worlds and worlds anew at each and every moment within us!* something precious from our very own inner-oceans of being.

After leaving my rock by the Hudson River, I contemplate that inspirational flash again and again, trying to squeeze a specific conclusion or insight out of it. But as time goes by, the feeling begins to grow dull and fade. And I wonder, am I remembering the experience correctly or just chasing its

echoes? Soon, as I am starting to doubt myself, I am reminded of another story from the Torah, also featuring water and a rock.

In the Book of Numbers, the children of Israel are thirsty and discontent, complaining to Moses of the lack of water in the desert. So G-d instructs Moses: If you will speak to the rock, the rock will gush forth with enough H<sub>2</sub>O for all. Unfortunately, instead of following this command to engage in peaceful dialogue with the rock, Moses strikes it violently with his staff, splitting it apart. Water does indeed flow out, but for taking such forceful action in contrast to the gentler spirit of G-d's commandment, Moses is forbidden from ever entering the Promised Land of Eretz Yisrael.

You see, I have come to realize that moments like the one I had on that rock by the river cannot simply be forced or willed into existence. Often when we go searching and hunting for them, we do not find them. Sometimes they find us when we least expect it. Perhaps when you closed your eyes before, nothing came to you right away either.

Though we often find ourselves rock-like in our cynicism towards the miracles of life, sometimes when enough drops of gentle water have tapped down on our heads, we set aside our cynicism and become open to the waters of awe and mystery. And so, in the end, I am thankful for all my times on the rocks of life, for they help bring me back to that place within where the waters of inspiration flow.

**Ben Friedman** is a poet, philosopher, and creative writer living in New York City. He graduated in 2007 from the University of Pennsylvania with a B.A. in English and Cinema Studies, and is currently taking graduate courses at NYU in Anthropology and Religious Studies. Ben has participated in the Adamah Fellowship as well as the Elat Chayyim Internship Programs at the Isabella Freedman Jewish Retreat Center in Connecticut, where he has learned about and practiced a spirited form of Renewal Judaism, engaged in conscious community, and gained first hand experience in organic farming and ecological sustainability.

# ISRAELI TECHNOLOGY CAN HELP CLEAN THE GULF OIL SPILL

by Baruch Gordon, reprinted with permission from Arutz Sheva Israel News

It's taken millions of dollars to cap it, and it could take billions more to clean it up. BP's oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico is perhaps the environmental catastrophe of the century. But Tel Aviv University has a solution that may help remedy the remaining oil residue through a natural, biological process.

Professor Eugene Rosenberg and Professor Eliora Ron of Tel Aviv University's (TAU) Department of Molecular Microbiology and Biotechnology are using naturally occurring oil-munching bacteria, grown at their lab, to clean the hard-to-reach oil pockets that occur when oil mixes with sand and organic matter on beaches and forms a thin layer on the Gulf's precious waterways.

"It's worked to clean up an oil spill on the coast of Haifa, Israel, so we've already got good evidence it could work in Florida, too," says Prof. Ron. Details of their decades of research appear in *The Handbook of Hydrocarbon and Lipid Microbiology*, published this year by Springer Verlag.

## Using nature itself to fight contamination

The researchers identified a naturally occurring variety of sea-borne bacteria that digests oil. By studying the bacteria's genetic background, developing methods of growing the bacteria, and increasing

their capacity to ingest the oil, the scientists have developed a solution that could clean up the residual oil that can't be removed by mechanical means.

Professor Ron says that sucking up surface oil pools and containing the oil are important and necessary first-step actions. But her solution addresses the smaller amounts of oil left behind that which isn't easily removed from sand and water. It is this small percentage of oil that sits under rocks and forms a thin film on the water's surface. Her bacterial solution can remove this oil, which is necessary to protect the sea's wildlife.

"We see sad pictures of birds covered in oil and people with good intentions cleaning bird wings," says Prof. Ron. "But by the time the oil is on their wings, it's too late. Birds die because oil gets into their lungs."

"The problem is huge and even with just a little bit in your lungs, oil is bad. Even when cleanup crews reduce the amount of oil at sea, there will probably be enough left behind to kill birds and wildlife." At this level of oil removal, the researcher says, the only solution is bioremediation: using nature itself to do the final cleanup.



# Think Globally, Act Locally: World Water Monitoring Day

The **United States Forest Service** and **Jewish National Fund** work together for the environment, caring for forests and protecting water. *You* can help!

Every year students all over the world take part in World Water Monitoring Day. The day itself falls on October 18, which commemorates the anniversary of the 1972 U.S. Clean Water Act; however, water can be tested at any time. Water monitoring kits are provided by the **United States Forest Service** and **Jewish National Fund** at no cost. Students go to sources of running water such as rivers and streams. They use the kits to test the quality of the water, and report their findings on-line.

Instructions in the kit explain to students and teachers how to test for pH, temperature, dissolved oxygen, and turbidity. The pH level assesses the acidity of the water; temperature and not enough dissolved oxygen can affect living plants and animals in the water; and turbidity is the clarity of the water.



Students from thirty-nine countries have participated and 3,900 different bodies of water have been tested. People from across the globe are united as they share information and perform the same tasks regardless of where they live. The process is also unifying on a local scale. Testing water encourages students to get outside, explore the places they inhabit, and learn something about their environment.

Recently, students from Mitzpeh Ramon, in the Negev, went out with their kits to test the water. There was just one problem — they couldn't find any running water to test! All they could find in the riverbeds were a few puddles of stagnant water. But the determined students didn't give up. They got onto a bus and travelled east to Ein Saharonim, an oasis for the wild animals of the desert. Still no luck! Then they went north to Ein Mor, one of the most famous springs in Israel, and were very happy to finally find some running water to test! The students checked to see if the water was clear, measured the temperature (which rises if industry dumps waste into the water) and tested to see if any chemicals had seeped in.

Taking part in World Water Monitoring Day is fun. Visit [www.jnf.org/waterkits](http://www.jnf.org/waterkits) to order a water monitoring kit. The kit includes materials for 50 students to monitor the contents of water from a local source, such as that stream you might have running through your town, and instructions

for inputting the data into a website that records water quality across the globe.

Test your local water. Share your findings globally, and donate to **JNF** water projects which provide much-needed water to Israelis every day.

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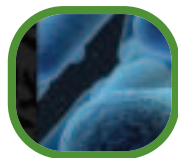
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Send news of your latest project to [education@jnf.org](mailto:education@jnf.org).



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# *The Waters Before Creation, Or: Drawing Spiritual Insights from a Rock*

By Benjamin Friedman

## *Discussion Starters*

1. How does Benjamin Friedman connect the story of Creation to an act of creativity? (Before the artist or builder realizes the finished work, there is a vast ocean of formless possibility. But then, thanks to forces beyond our reckoning, coherent thoughts take form and grow into reality. This is a miracle.) Do you agree with Benjamin Friedman's comparison? Why or why not?. (There is not just one correct answer to this question.)
2. What do you do for inspiration? (Some examples: listen to music, take a walk, pray, go to a scenic spot, talk to family members or friends, read)

## *Activities*

1. Celebrate the miracle of water with a *Chagigat Mayim*, מַיִם מְיִיגָת a Water Celebration! Invite younger students to celebrate with you, or visit seniors at an assisted living center. Click here for the *Chagigat Mayim Ceremony*.
2. Express the miracle of inspiration with your own water-inspired art. Illustrate this verse with a water-color painting, a dance, or music:

*Now the earth was astonishingly empty, and darkness was on the face of the deep, and the spirit of G-d was hovering over the face of the water"*  
(*Bereishit, Chapter 1, Verse 2*)

Share your creation with your group, or with other members of the community.

# ISRAELI TECHNOLOGY CAN HELP CLEAN THE GULF OIL SPILL

by Baruch Gordon, reprinted with permission from Arutz Sheva Israel News

## Discussion Starters

1. What solution have researchers at Tel Aviv University found that may help remedy the problem of residue from the Gulf oil spill? (Using naturally occurring oil-munching bacteria, grown at the TAU lab)
2. Which liquid do you think is more valuable to Israel, water or oil? Why? (There is not just one correct answer. Consider the following:

Water is scarce in Israel and throughout the Middle East. JNF helps alleviate the problem by supplying water to more than 1.2 million Israelis with projects that include water conservation, river rehabilitation and recycling. Rivers and lakes run through more than one country, so neighbors must share, not divert or pollute water sources. Israel provides more than 80 million cubic meters of water to the Palestinians, and 50 million cubic meters of water to the Jordanians each year.

Every modern country depends on oil, and vast resources are located in the Middle East. Much of today's politics center around oil. However, Israel, with support from JNF, is a leader in developing alternate sources of energy.)

## Activities

Support JNF's work supplying water to more than 1.2 million Israelis. Here are some fun ways to raise money:

1. **Let it Rain!**  
Raise one dollar for every inch of rain you would like to fall in Israel. Check the level of the Kinneret, Israel's major source of potable water (posted on-line at [www.jnf.org/waterkits](http://www.jnf.org/waterkits)). Teach younger students about the water shortage in Israel, and collect tzedakah each week in JNF blue boxes. (For blue boxes, contact [education@jnf.org](mailto:education@jnf.org))
2. **Open a "Water Stand."**  
Give out information about water in Israel, ([contact education@jnf.org](mailto:education@jnf.org)) and sell water to thirsty customers. To be most environmentally friendly, use recyclable paper cups, pouring water from a pitcher, rather than selling bottled water.

# Think Globally, Act Locally: World Water Monitoring Day

## Discussion Starters:



## Activities:

- 1.** How is World Water Monitoring Day an example of globalism? *(Via the internet, students from across the world are sharing information while performing the same tasks, regardless of where they live.)*
- 2.** Why is it important for Jewish people in the United States to help supply water to Israelis? *(Answers may include that all Jewish people are responsible for each other, that water supplies are crucial to stability in the Middle East, and that water does not stay within boundaries --rivers flow from country to country, oceans from continent to continent.)*
- 1.** Participate in World Water Monitoring Day. Go to [www.jnf.org/waterkits](http://www.jnf.org/waterkits) to register and receive a water testing kit at no charge. At that same address you will find information on water in Israel and in Jewish thought.
- 2.** Plan a trip to visit a watershed. Take photos and make a slide show to teach others about what you observe.
- 3.** Clean up trash in a local area.