

Yes, You Should Be a Tree Hugger

“When the Holy One, blessed be He, created Adam, the first man, God took him and showed him all the trees in the Garden of Eden, and God said to him: ‘See My creations, how beautiful and exemplary they are. Everything I created, I created for you. Make certain that you do not ruin and destroy My world, as if you destroy it, there will be no one to mend it after you.’” –Kohelet Rab-bah 7:13

By CANDACE ROTHSTEIN

Not too long ago, it was considered laughable at best and a straight-up insult at worst to be called a “tree hugger.” Photos of people chaining themselves to trees to prevent them from being cut down were shown as hilarious examples of left-wing extremism.

Now, trees are often touted as THE solution to climate change. More trees=less carbon in the atmosphere!

Less carbon=a cooler planet. Win win! When corporations claim to “offset” their emissions, this often means they are contributing to programs which claim to plant trees for the purpose of carbon capture. In actuality, planting a bunch of trees is not the beautiful, simple solution that it often claims to be. This is because what captures and sequesters carbon from the atmosphere is not necessarily an abundance of trees. It’s forests.

Forests have a delicate and complex system of biodiversity and balance. A functioning and healthy forest pulls carbon from the air and sequesters it, but when deforestation occurs, all that carbon gets pushed back out, irreversibly. It’s a sobering fact that if nothing changes in the current rate of deforestation, the Amazon rainforest as well as many other forests will soon become a

source of carbon emissions rather than a solution to its removal.

So, maybe we don’t need to chain ourselves to a tree to keep it from being cut down, but it’s clear that stopping the deforestation of our forests and rebuilding their ecosystems is essential to stopping climate change.

One of the best ways to protect our forests is to support indigenous peoples and local communities, who manage 54% of the world’s remaining intact forests. Their stewardship of the land is essential to protect and sustain the necessary biodiversity and ecosystem that keep a forest alive.

In Judaism, it’s traditional to plant trees on Tu B’Shevat to celebrate new life and the new year of the trees. *Etz chaim*—trees are a life-giving symbol in

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Guest Column

Greenberg: An Urgent Call to Action

By SUSAN GREENBERG

Recent policy shifts impacting vulnerable populations necessitate a strong response from us at Jewish Family & Child Service (JFCS). Our mission, deeply rooted in the Jewish values of *tikkun olam* (to repair the world), *gemilut chasadim* (acts of lovingkindness), and *tzedakah* (justice through charity), compels us to speak out against these changes and to work towards policies that uphold equity and human dignity.

We are particularly alarmed by the increased arrests and detentions of immigrants — actions that sow fear and disrupt the lives of individuals who contribute positively to our society. Such measures starkly contradict our commitment to sanctuary, respect, and human rights. Furthermore, the cessation of federal funding for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) initiatives threatens to reverse our progress toward inclusivity and equality.

Here are immediate ways you can take action and stand with us:

- Engage with ACLU of Oregon: Access critical resources on protecting immigrant rights. aclu-or.org/en/know-your-rights-immigrants-rights
- Volunteer with Bend the Arc: Join efforts to advocate for justice and equality. bendthearc.us
- Support HIAS: Learn about protecting refugee rights under challenging governmental policies. hias.org/news/refugee-rights-and-trump-administration-week-two
- Get Involved with Indivisible: Take part in actions that drive change. mobilize.us/indivisible/?tag_ids=25780
- Help Lutheran Community Services Northwest: Contribute your time to expand their outreach programs. lcsnw.org/2025/01/lcsn-wundaunted/
- Utilize the Oregon Department of Justice Community Toolkit: Equip yourself with knowledge

to defend rights at a community level. doj.state.or.us/oregon-department-of-justice/civil-rights/sanctuary-promise/community-toolkit

- Join Oregon for All: Ensure our schools remain safe and inclusive environments for all children. [ti-nyurl.com/OregonForAll](https://nyurl.com/OregonForAll)

The policy shifts we face not only contradict our values but also undermine the progress we’ve made towards building a more equitable society. We urge a reconsideration of these measures. Together, let’s renew our commitment to fostering a community that celebrates diversity and inclusivity.

Thank you for standing with us.

Susan Greenberg is the Executive Director of Jewish Family & Child Service in Portland.

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