

April 28, 2022

A Mitzvah Grows at WRT

As a child, and if I'm being honest well into adulthood, *The Lorax* was one of my favorite books. For those of you who are not familiar with the story, a twelve-year-old boy who lives in a polluted place devoid of nature goes to see the once guardian of the forest, the Lorax, who tells him the story of how the natural environment was destroyed. At the end of the book, the Lorax warns the boy, "Unless someone like you cares a whole awful lot, nothing is going to get better. It's not." To quote another children's favorite, this is a "tale as old as time," told again and again in movies and books: *Ferngully*, *Wall-E*, and *Our House is on Fire: Greta Thunberg's Call to Save the Planet*, to name just a few. But this story really began with the allegory in the Garden of Eden in which G-d told Adam, "Take care not to damage and destroy My world, for if you destroy it, there is no one to repair it after you." (Midrash Kohelet Rabbah 7:13). And while this was one of the first commandments given to us by the Eternal, the collective we have not listened.

This past weekend, I had the pleasure of celebrating Earth Day with Sharing Shabbat families. We planted a burlap sack garden containing a mixture of lettuces, radishes, scallions, and edible flowers. The intent that accompanied this Mitzvah Garden was to think about the Earth, the nourishment it provides us, and the healing we must help it undergo. Indeed, Asher Landes, the farmer who led us from Empress Greens, Inc., challenged us to find a blessing from our own lives and "plant" it in the earth along with the seeds and seedlings we would soon plant. Next, each participant, parents and children, painted a sign to decorate the garden. The signs reflected the intent and meaning that each individual person brought to this work - in the end there were images of hope, nature, sunlight, community, and beauty.

While we honored G-d's creation and warning not to destroy it in a literal sense, celebrating nature and planting new growth, we also honored the broader meaning of the Eternal's caution and guidance. For it is the entire world that has been given to us, including the people that inhabit this Earth. When G-d placed Adam in the Garden of Eden it was so that humankind could "cultivate and care for it." (Genesis 4:15) We must not just cultivate the land, we must work to care for the world and the people in it. While we planted the WRT Mitzvah Garden in honor of Earth Day, we did so with the objective of growing food to donate to HOPE Services. As I discussed in my previous entry "WRT Comes Together To Address Food Insecurity in Westchester County," the children and teens of WRT recognized that food donations tend to come as shelf stable items. Simply put, they noticed that with all the donations, there were no fresh fruits and vegetables. So as we moved past Passover and looked toward Shavuot (a celebration of harvest), families at WRT planted a Mitzvah Garden that would grow food to help sustain those who have less access to fresh vegetables. With sunshine, music, dirty hands, and a shared meal, we were able to honor the Earth on this Earth Day, planting the seeds of change in our next generations.

I have been here at WRT as the Director of Social Impact and Community Engagement for a little over four months, and I, with each of your help, am cultivating our WRT world, growing a culture of *tzedek* (justice), *tzedakah* (charitable giving), and *kehillah* (community). Through advocacy, education, and giving, we work together toward *tikkun olam* (repairing our world). We are all a part of the *mitzvot* growing at WRT.



As a garden will not flourish if forgotten and thus requires continuous attention, so does our world. Learn more about ways each of you can continue this work.

Advocate for Green Legislation: RAC-NY is urging New York Legislators to reduce greenhouse gas emissions from buildings. To learn more about environmental work at RAC, visit <https://rac.org/issues/environment-and-climate-change>.

Volunteer for Cooking4HOPE: Cooking4HOPE is a centerpiece of *tzedakah* programming at WRT. Cooking4HOPE is always in need of volunteers for monthly hot dinner-making and bakers for weekly lunch projects. Please consider becoming a volunteer in Cooking4HOPE so that this WRT tradition of *tzedakah* and *gemilut chasidim* may continue.

Read with your children with intent: Check out the list wonderful books that focus on environmental justice and teach children to care about the environment at https://www.huffpost.com/entry/childrens-books-environment_1_5d66f45de4b063c341fa409c.

In the community: If you and your family are looking for other ways to fight food insecurity in the community, you can consider learning more about some of the organizations we at WRT have partnered with: HOPE Community Services, Feeding Westchester, Lifting Up Westchester and Mott Haven Fridge.

Environmental Impact at WRT: To learn more ways that WRT is Green, visit WRT's Environmental Impact page on the WRT website under "Impact".