



Derech HaAretz Outdoor Yeshiva

Derech HaAretz (Way of the Earth) Outdoor Yeshiva's mission is to help people cultivate a direct personal experience of the Divine in the Living World through intermediate and advanced training in Jewish Earth-based spirituality, wilderness skills, and ancestral arts.:

A) Opportunity: *What is the problem that Derech HaAretz exists to solve?*

The Jewish world is currently blessed with a growing number of top-notch organizations providing entry-level training and experiences in Earth-based Jewish practice.

But where do their teachers and leaders come from? Where can their students go to take their training to an advanced level and join a community of peer-level practitioners? Currently, there are few -- if any -- schools for educators and established practitioners to receive *next-level training* that integrates Judaism, wilderness survival, and ancestral arts.

Where do they go instead? Financial and time limitations often mean that those on an Earth-based Jewish path have to choose between:

- *Mainstream yeshivot and other indoor Jewish institutions:*
Many of these programs either de-emphasize nature-based Judaism or approach it from a text-based rather than experiential perspective - or -
- *Wilderness schools outside the Jewish community:*
Many of these schools borrow or appropriate from Native American and other indigenous non-Hebraic cultures in ways that can lead to contradictions when translated into a Jewish environment.

This choice creates an unnatural split. Graduates then often find themselves trying to graft Jewish principles onto outdoor skills and outdoor skills on to Judaism -- as if there were a separation between the two. The split also leads to staffing problems for Jewish outdoor programs and summer camps. Leadership may have deep, integrated skills in both areas. But many of their teachers and counselors do not. This split is passed on to their campers, students and communities.

The disunification between nature and spirit dwells near the heart of our world's current ecological crisis. It falls to all religions and cultures to heal this split in order that we may together heal the world. For Judaism to fulfill its potential as a "light unto the world" we must mend this breach among ourselves and recover our own Indigenous traditions.

We believe this mending will empower the Jewish people to authentically add our light to the growing worldwide movement towards an ecologically just and sustainable future for all beings and our planet.

B) Approach: *What is our unique solution to this problem? Who is our audience? How do we serve them?*

Derech HaAretz helps to bring this Jewish light forward by providing next-level training that interweaves Earth skills, Jewish spirituality & culture, and traditional Jewish crafts as a unified whole. Our offerings fall into three main categories, geared to the following audiences:

1. Training programs for intermediate to advanced practitioners already on an Earth-based Jewish path (derech), as well as Jewish educators and spiritual leaders who already have at least a basic level of Jewish Earth-skills knowledge and experience.
2. Professional development and consulting services to synagogues, Jewish schools, summer camps and outdoor education programs, as well as to other centers for Earth-based Judaism
3. Workshops, rituals, public events, and youth programs -- generally co-produced with other organisations -- that promote Earth-based Jewish practices to the broader Jewish community

We serve our audiences through programs designed to encourage positive spiritual transformation (b'ezrat HaShem) and experiential, integrated education through:

- Teacher training and professional development
- Personal spiritual and skills mentoring
- Wilderness skills drawing on contemporary Jewish values and ancient, indigenous Hebraic wisdom, such as: wilderness survival from a Jewish perspective, harvesting halacha, bird language & midrash, and praying with fire
- Jewish ancestral arts including: sheep-herding, weaving, crafting ritual objects (tallitot, parchment, etc.), and other cultural legacies
- Indigenous solidarity/support and tikkun olam ("world repair": environmental and social justice) projects
- WildJews! Outdoor Living project: Week- to year-long laboratories for developing communities of practice
- Rituals and holiday celebrations
- Earth-torah, text and folklore study
- Summer camp and rites of passage program support

As mentioned earlier, the Jewish community is blessed with many excellent programs and communities -- such as as Isabella Freedman, Wilderness Torah, and Urban Adamah -- that provide basic training in the subjects listed above. The question for many of their alumni and long-term community members or those who have been studying on their own is "what's next?"

Derech HaAretz aims to be the number one answer to this question.

3) Vision: *How does the world look different once we have solved this problem?*

To put this vision in the present tense: The world looks beautiful! What did we help accomplish?

- The majority of Jews now think of themselves as part of nature, not separate from it -- and act accordingly
- Earth-based Judaism is mainstream Judaism -- and considered essential to Jewish education and ordination
- Thousands of Jews and allies who trained with Derech HaAretz now teach others to cultivate their own personal relationship with the Divine in the living world
- Derech HaAretz alumni are engaged in communities of practice worldwide
- A small but growing number of people know what it is like to live in outdoors spiritual community for months or years at a time

Most importantly: Derech HaAretz has played our small but vital role in helping humanity return to living in harmony with the rest of the natural world.

4) Tachlis (Brass Tacks): *What are the short-term goals/objectives?*

Our first and foremost goal -- short and long-term -- is to facilitate positive spiritual transformation for our students. Our second-most important goal in the short-term is to build a solid organizational "nest" from which our fledgling organization can grow, thrive, and be of greater service to the community.

Short-term objectives for achieving this goal include:

- Expanding the number and depth of our programs, trainings, and events
- Building organizational structures to support our mission, including articles of incorporation, non-profit status/fiscal sponsorship, legal documents for governance and liability, insurance, etc.
- Hiring 2-3 employees for administration, marketing and fundraising
- Deepening our experience and knowledge base through research and professional development

In the longer-term we envision a year-round, land-based school with drop-in and residential programs -- including highly-sought after certification for Jewish professionals and course credit for s'micha (ordination) programs.

5) Success! *What long-term impacts we hope to achieve?*

Our long-term kavannah (intention) is for Derech HaAretz to:

- Challenge and support experienced practitioners to significantly deepen their skills and flourish on their path
- Increase the number of high-quality educators and advanced practitioners in Earth-based Judaism, wilderness skills, and ancestral arts
- Set a new standard for Jewish outdoor educational professional development and certification
- Give young adults graduating from Earth-based Jewish programs a place to continue their skills education and further spiritual development
- Center ancient and indigenous Jewish practices into the current dialogue about what constitutes traditional Judaism
- Develop programs and curricula which will be incorporated into mainstream rabbinic, cantoral and other s'micha-track programs
- Achieve our mission of helping people cultivate a direct personal experience of the Divine in the Living World, and assist others to do the same