



Rabbi David Mevorach Seidenberg, Scholar-in-Residence and Teacher

Rabbi David Seidenberg is the author of *Kabbalah and Ecology: God's Image in the More-Than-Human World* (Cambridge University Press, 2015), and the creator of neohasid.org. Rabbi Seidenberg teaches text, music and dance, and all aspects of Jewish thought and spirituality, in their own right and in relation to ecology and the environment. He is one of the world's foremost scholars on Judaism and ecology. He has published research on Kabbalah and Hasidic thought, Talmud, the Sabbatical year ([link below](#)), evolution and cosmology, sustainability, animal rights, Maimonides, Buber, and more. He is a noted liturgist and translator, and leads Hasidic-style davening (prayer) and *nigunim* (melodies). He has also worked as an activist and community organizer. Rabbi Seidenberg founded the first Hasidic egalitarian *minyan* in New York in 1995, and has organized similar *minyanim* in Los Angeles and other locales. Rabbi Seidenberg was ordained by both the Jewish Theological Seminary and Rabbi Zalman Schachter-Shalomi, the founder of Jewish Renewal, and holds a doctorate from the Jewish Theological Seminary in Jewish thought. He lives in Northampton MA and teaches throughout North America and the world.

Rabbi Seidenberg's teaching empowers learners to become creators of Judaism through deep study and communion with texts and tradition. He brings not only expertise in science and texts, but also engagement with spirit, embodiment, and ritual. His personal practice includes a focus on the "shamanic" dimension of rituals and religious practices like Shabbat and Sukkot. His book *Kabbalah and Ecology* has been called "stunning" (R. Yitz Greenberg), and "one of the most, if not the most, original and important contributions to the growing discourse around religion and the environment of the last decade" (Jeremy Benstein, Heschel Center for the Sustainability in Israel).

Rabbi David Seidenberg leads scholar-in-residence *Shabbatonim* across the country, and is available for lectures and seminars. He also works as an editor of Jewish Studies-related books and projects. Rabbi Seidenberg is the creator of resources for Tu Bishvat and Tisha B'Av used throughout the world, and has traveled to diverse communities to lead creative and traditional observances for both days. He also frequently leads rituals derived from the eco-spirituality movement like "The Cosmic Walk" ([link below](#)) that incorporate science and Spirit. See descriptions of five thematic Shabbaton programs below.



Links to Rabbi Seidenberg's work

Learn more about Rabbi Seidenberg's groundbreaking work, *Kabbalah and Ecology: God's Image in the More-Than-Human World*, at: <http://kabbalahandecology.com>

The extensive collection of Tu Bishvat resources developed by Rabbi Seidenberg can be accessed at: http://www.neohasid.org/resources/tu_bishvat/

Rabbi Seidenberg's translation of Eikhah, *Laments*, used throughout the world, can be accessed at: <http://www.neohasid.org/resources/laments/>

For links to David's articles, go to: <http://neohasid.org/about/upcoming>

Rabbi Seidenberg's advanced text study on the Shmitah/Sabbatical year and the covenant can be downloaded from jewcology.org: http://jewcology.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/12/Genesis_covenant_commentary_7.pdf

Rabbi Seidenberg's version of the Cosmic Walk ritual can be studied and downloaded from: [http://www.neohasid.org/ecohasid/Cosmic Walk final 2011.pdf](http://www.neohasid.org/ecohasid/Cosmic_Walk_final_2011.pdf)

See also: <http://neohasid.org/about/pub>, <http://neohasid.org/about/teaching>

From the Introduction to *Kabbalah and Ecology*:

We live in a wondrous place, this Earth, filled with beauty and surprise. A world where the merest sparkle on the surface of the water can suggest in its variation the infinitude of the universe, the “*ru'ach Elohim m'rachefet*” – the spirit of God hovering, fluttering on the face of the waters; a world where all our senses can be filled and overflow; a world in which we share so much with even the wildest and least known creatures. As human beings we have the potential to be enchanted by all those creatures, to act in love and in faith toward them, and toward the greater mystery and unity that is all Being and that transcends all Being. As human beings, we have the potential to feel compassion for all people and all creatures we meet, and yet we have such passions and dispassions as to make us forget compassion.

Compassion does arise, naturally and spontaneously, from the moment we encounter an Other. Moral reflection can extend the reach of that compassion, even beyond the neighbor, and beyond the span of a single lifetime. But our moral vision is too easily limited to what we can imagine in our mind's eye. Religion at its best serves to magnify the power of compassion and moral vision beyond the naked eye and the “naked mind”, to extend it over hundreds or thousands of years. Religion can teach us how to act to preserve life far beyond the horizon of what any of us can calculate or plan for. Religion, ritual, faith, tradition, all of them exist as guides, not just for one lifetime or for one generation, but for the proverbial seven generations, that is, for as long as any civilization will last, potentially for tens of thousands of years.

This truth is embedded in the Torah's plea to each person she addresses: “Choose life, so that you and your seed will live!” (Deut. 30 :19)



Examples of Shabbaton themes and sessions

(elements from any of these sessions may be incorporated into a single Shabbaton)

- “Tsfat Shabbat” – focusing on *Chasidus* (Hasidic thought), *nigunim* or spiritual melodies, and davening, with a special emphasis on embodied prayer, including dance. Experiential elements of these themes are also incorporated into any Kabbalat Shabbat service led by Rabbi Seidenberg. Sessions may also include studying the teachings of Rebbe Nachman of Breslov, Shneur Zalman of Liady (the Alter Rebbe, founder of Chabad Hasidism), Zev Wolf of Zhitomir, and of course the Baal Shem Tov, their ethics and the ecological implications of their thought, and in the case of Rebbe Nachman, the theurgy of dance.
- “Kabbalah and the Exuberance of Life” – looking at Kabbalah through the lens of ecology to uncover a new environmental ethic, focusing especially on the role of Kabbalah in extending God’s image to the more-than-human world. Issues that may be covered include biodiversity, animal rights, climate change, fracking, and genetic engineering. Sessions may also provide a basic introduction to native Kabbalistic concepts like the *Sefirot* and *Partzufim*, the vision of the universe as *Adam Kadmon*, the souls of animals, the light of the Earth, and Kabbalistic beliefs about reincarnation. Sessions may also focus specifically on the Zohar or on the writings of Yosef ben Shalom Ashkenazi, Moshe Cordovero, the Shlah (Isaiah Horowitz), and Shneur Zalman of Liady (the Alter Rebbe).
- “The Passions of Maimonides” – focusing on Maimonides’s teachings in the *Guide for the Perplexed* related to animal rights, organic cosmology, and his rejection of anthropocentrism. Sessions may be devoted to comparing Maimonides’s ideas with the science of Gaia theory (the idea that the Earth functions like a living organism) and with the science of evolution, and, more generally, what his work teaches us about the uncensored history of science. Discussion may also touch on the evolution of his thought, his later repudiation of Saadiah Gaon, and his significance for medieval philosophy (including Christian and Islamic thought).
- “Living the Cycles of the Earth” – focusing on the meaning of the Jewish Festivals in the lifeworld and agriculture of ancient Israel, the Shmitah (Sabbatical year) cycle, and the human place in the cosmos. Sessions may include extended text study on Shmitah and its role in the covenant, examining the fact that in the Torah the land is viewed as a partner to the covenant, whose rights may take precedence over human survival. Discussion can also include comparison with social ecology (Murray Bookchin) and deep ecology (Aldo Leopold). Related focuses include the meaning of ritual according to Kabbalah and the role of the Earth and embodiment, comparison of Jewish practices with Native American rites, Shabbat as weekly practice for the Shmitah and Jubilee years, and the shamanistic meaning of harvest rituals (especially relevant to Sukkot).
- “Love Your Neighbor/Love the Stranger” - focus on human rights, peace, halakhah and ethics. Sessions include study of the principle of human equality in midrash and Talmud, the evolution of the idea of *tikkun olam* from Mishnah through the modern period, *imitatio Dei* (the ideal of imitating God’s actions), and the principle of *kedushah* (the command to be holy). This study can include how such ideas and principles relate to contemporary issues like immigration reform and immigrant rights, communal responsibility for the poor, and issues concerning Israel, such as the situation of the Bedouin. Sessions may also focus on modern thinkers like Martin Buber and Yitz Greenberg.