

## **Stop drilling, and plant!**

### *Thought for the Day*

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Last week Jewish people throughout the world completed the annual cycle of readings from the Torah and immediately began again at the beginning – Genesis, the story of the creation, the very beginning. This week we read the stories of Noah's Ark and the Tower of Babel. All of these are stories that emphasise the common origin of humanity, and the fact that we are literally, not just metaphorically, all in the same boat.

There's a well-known parable that was first taught by Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai, one of the great sages of the Talmud and one of the founders of Kabbalah – not the stuff of pop stars and red ribbons, but the ancient Jewish mysticism that developed in the generation after the Romans destroyed Jerusalem and tried to destroy Judaism too. He spoke about a group of people in a lifeboat: one of them took a drill and started to drill a hole under his seat; when the others frantically objected, he defended himself, "What's it to do with you? I'm only drilling under my own seat – I wouldn't dream of touching yours!"

The fallacy is obvious, and so is the moral. When I turn up the thermostat, I'm only drilling under my own seat. When I drive when I could take a bus, I'm only drilling under my own seat. When we cook more than we can eat, or dig up trees and don't replant, we're only drilling under our own seat.

There's another story in the Talmud about a rabbi of an even earlier generation, Choni haMe'agel, who saw an old man planting a carob tree. He asked, "How long will it be till this tree bears fruit?" When the old man replied, "Seventy years", Choni asked whether he really expected to be around to eat the fruit. The old man responded: "I found mature carob trees in the world because my ancestors planted them for me, and so I plant these for the good of my children."

So let's all stop drilling, and plant!