CLOSE TO NATURE. CLOSE TO GOD, CLOSE TO GOD'S WORD

"Is a tree a human?" (Deuteronomy 20:19)

Books are made from paper. Paper is made from trees. Trees come from the ground.

"You are dust and you'll go back to dust." (Genesis 3:19)

People are made of DNA. The prevalent chemicals of DNA are Carbon, Oxygen, Hydrogen, Nitrogen-- just like the prevalent chemicals in the ground. The food we eat, from which we build our bodies, comes, directly or indirectly, from the ground.

But people are not only DNA. They are also dreams. In fact, that is a good way of locating humans in the Great Chain of Being. We are at the intersection of DNA and dreams.

God is invisible, incorporeal. But God is made manifest, both in our DNA-- our bodies, and in our dreams-- our souls. When God's word enters into our bodies, it has the power to activate our souls.

When a book contains God's name, we treat it with the same reverence with which we treat a human body-- because both of those physical objects have become signified as containers of God's holiness. We bury people, and we bury sacred books.

This past August 18, a minyan of mitzvah-fulfillers assembled at Temple Israel. First, we learned the story of the Cairo Genizah, the most famous store-room for sacred books in Jewish history. Then, we traveled to Mikro Kodesh Cemetery, where some of the first families of Norfolk and Berkley Jewish communities are laid to rest, to bury a room's full of worn-out sacred books. We recited prayers for the occasion, and we all pitched in to give the books a decent and respectful farewell.

Many thanks to all who participated. This is a mitzvah that involved people, body and soul.

This was a mitzvah that, in the normal course of affairs, we have the opportunity to fulfill only once every several years. This year's genizah program will endure in the memory of all who took part as a time of camaraderie, learning, and piety.