



Green Apprenticeship Permaculture and Ecovillage Design Alumni Report Series Claire Cohen, Vegan Chef Spring 2008 Session

Claire Cohen holds a BA in Humanities, Ceramics and French from the University of Colorado, Boulder. She currently has her hands full with various educational and ecological endeavors, including studying for a Masters in Holistic Nutrition, cultivating her new vegan cheffing business called Nosh (www.noshveg.com), and spreading the joy of permaculture all over Los Angeles.



Green Apprenticeship Class of Spring 2008

Top row (L to R): Satheesh, Wind turbine specialist, India; Joel, B. Ed. Elementary education, University of Wisconsin; Uria, outdoor education, Israel; Eden, musician and environmental activist, Colorado; Mark, BA Psyc. Boston U., now an organic farmer in Oregon.

Bottom: Stacy, BSc Business Admin. University of Colorado, now works with recycled building materials; Shelley, natural builder, Israel and US; Michal, BA, Political Science, Haifa University, now organic landscaping, Israel; Sivan, MSc marine biology, Israel; **Claire Cohen**, vegan chef, Los Angeles; Rachel, math teacher, Japan and Vermont; Stacie, architect, NYC.

A Paradigm of Possibility

What began as a project to keep me occupied while in Israel became one of the most important experiences of my life. Early on in our year abroad, my husband Brad, a student at Hebrew Union College, suggested perhaps I should find a program to keep me busy and motivated for the year. Ulpan wasn't cutting it, and I was beginning to feel lost and overwhelmed by the cultural adaptation and months ahead. While searching online one day, he blurted, "wow, you *have* to do this." What was to come truly inspired a real connection for me; a connection to Israel, to its land, to new values, and to incredible people sharing common love for a healthy earth.

I came to Lotan with a very vague idea of what Permaculture was, and left with a depth of understanding so great, it was difficult to explain to my friends and family. David Bellamy writes, "Permaculture is a successful approach to designing sustainable environments which have the diversity, stability, and resilience of natural ecosystems, whilst also providing for the needs of the people who use them. It is based on the philosophy of co-operating with nature and caring for the earth and its people."

Our days of the Green Apprenticeship were spent *living* Permaculture, investigating its every element, understanding its ethics and principles through study and experiment. As a community, we struggled to work together and triumphed as a team. We literally crafted the evolution of mud...from the desert sand to an ecologically sound and functional structure, a home, or simply a place to sit after a long day of sheet-mulching. Nowhere else were my doubts about what was possible to achieve squashed by gleaming accomplishment. Our learning was so reinforced by doing; theory demonstrated by example, questions followed by discovery.

The floor of our earth-plastered geodesic dome home was filled with large gravel; it often snuck into unwanted places and was tricky for navigating barefoot. It was the weekend, Brad would be visiting, and my roommate Rachel and I had a "what if" moment. We decided to mud plaster our floor. We spent the weekend making batch after batch of mud, on



our hands and knees smoothing over the pebbly rough surface. It took quite a few days for the floor to dry...and we found ourselves kicked out of our dome by our own genius project, left to sleep in the desert sand. Almost sad to return to shelter, but excited to explore the results of our new floor, we kicked off our shoes to a chilly smooth surface. Not only had we solved the rough rocky problem, we had succeeded in cooling our dome—quite the bonus for a hot May in the Arava Valley! The week spent sleeping under the



desert stars and marveling at our work provided such an opportunity for appreciation and I realized what Lotan had given to me.



Lotan gifted to me a new paradigm; one that allows for the opportunity for *real* change, for *progress*, for *positivity*...a paradigm of *possibility*. Hazon seeks to encourage the continuation of such possibility. My experience at Lotan shaped for me a new spirituality; one that is connected to Judaism via the values and ethics associated with caring for the Earth. Hazon provides an inclusive community deeply committed to these values through education and action.

Last year, I had the incredible opportunity to attend the Hazon Food Conference, both as a participant and presenter. The weekend retreat in Northern California was an overwhelmingly positive experience, shared by hundreds of Jews with so much to contribute. Conference themes focused on Jewish food culture, cutting edge food law and policy, food justice, kosher meat issues, health and nutrition, cooking and

gardening, and Israeli food and agriculture. I led a session called, “Jewishly Gluten Free”, a workshop focusing on traditional Jewish foods adapted for a Gluten-free diet. This year I will present again on the topic, as well as participate in a chef’s roundtable panel discussing the importance and ethics of Jewish Vegetarianism. I am also on the food committee, helping to plan and design the menu for this year’s conference. My participation in the Hazon community has furthered my inspiration to garden, and we’ve begun our first at home, planting a very small plot in dresser drawers. Recently, we harvested from it a 16” zucchini and an 8 lb kabocha squash. Brad and I designed and created a vegetable garden at Hebrew Union College, and are in the process of implementing a school-wide composting program, encouraging and spreading the values of the Permaculture philosophy.



My involvement with Hazon is really a product of my experience at Lotan; inspiring change, emphasizing an earth-centered Judaism, and encouraging me to continue to engage in discussion and physical action that contributes to a sustainable and healthy planet.

Kibbutz Lotan’s Center for Creative Ecology is an environmental research and education institute. Its vision is that through *Tikkun Olam*, the Jewish concept of taking action to transform the world, we can build a just society that protects nature. It is supported by Israel’s Amutat Tzel Hatamar nonprofit registered society 580347029 and The Friends of Lotan (USA), a 501(c)(3), number 17053031035036 tax exempt organization.



The Green Apprenticeship is a Training Program in Practical Ecology using the Permaculture Design Course and Ecovillage Design Curriculum. The program is in partnership with Gaia Education and endorsed by UNITAR-United Nations Institute for Training and Research. Gaia Education is a program of the Global Ecovillage Network.

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