

# B'Artzenu In Our Land



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# B'Artzenu In Our Land

What does mean as a Jewish people to have a land, to return to the land and to be rooted in a land? What does it mean to us personally when we sing, "*Am Chofshi B'Artzenu*" – "A free people in our land" as a part Hatikvah? How is the land of Israel a part of who we are as Jews? Does the land of Israel have some kind of intrinsic power or holiness, or is it a land like any other?

This section, *B'Artzenu*, addresses the relationship of the Jewish People to the Land of Israel, a relationship that existed before the modern state of Israel. Through this selection of sources we will examine how different strains of Jewish thought can help form the basis of a relationship with contemporary Israel.

# Issue 1:

## The land of Israel: *What makes it Holy?*

### Text 1: Deuteronomy 11: 10 – 14

Shortly before the Children of Israel are to end their wanderings in the desert and arrive at their new homeland, Moses, as God's mouthpiece, relates the following information:

י כי הארץ, אשר אתה בא-שמה לרשתה--לא כארץ מצרים הוא, אשר יצאתם משם: אשר תזרע את-זרעך, והשקית ברגלך כגן הירק.

יא והארץ, אשר אתם עברים שמה לרשתה--ארץ הרים, ובקעת; למטר השמים, תשטה-מים.

יב ארץ, אשר-יהנה אלהיך דרש אתה: תמיד, עיני יהנה אלהיך בה--מרשית השנה, ועד אחרית שנה. {ס}

יג והיה, אם-שמע תשמעו אל-מצותי, אשר אנכי מצוה אתכם, היום--לאהבה את-יהנה אלהיכם, ולעבדו, בכל-לבבכם, ובכל-נפשכם.

יד ונתתי מטר-ארצכם בעתו, יורה ומלקוש; ואספת דגנך, ותירשך ויצהרך.

**10** For the land, whither thou goest in to possess it, is not as the land of Egypt, from whence ye came out, where thou didst sow thy seed, and didst water it with thy foot, as a garden of herbs;

**11** but the land, whither ye go over to possess it, is a land of hills and valleys, and drinketh water as the rain of heaven cometh down;

**12** a land which the LORD thy God careth for; the eyes of the LORD thy God are always upon it, from the beginning of the year even unto the end of the year. {S}

**13** And it shall come to pass, if ye shall hearken diligently unto My commandments which I command you this day, to love the LORD your God, and to serve Him with all your heart and with all your soul,

**14** that I will give the rain of your land in its season, the former rain and the latter rain, that thou mayest gather in thy corn, and thy wine, and thine oil.

#### Deuteronomy 11: 10 – 14

- How is the land of Israel different from Egypt?
- What makes it special?
- What is God's relationship with the land and with the people who will live there?

## Text 2: Rashi on Deuteronomy 11:10

*One of the most influential rabbinic commentators on the Torah, Rashi lived in Troyes, France from 1040-1105.*

**- אשר יצאתם משם**  
אפילו ארץ רעמסס [וארץ גושן] אשר ישבתם בה והיא במיטב ארץ מצרים שנאמר (בראשית מז, יא) במיטב הארץ וגו', אף היא אינה כארץ ישראל

*From which you have come – Even the Land of Ramses where you dwelled, which was the best of the land of Egypt...even it is not like the Land of Israel.*

**- והשקית ברגלך**  
ארץ מצרים הייתה צריכה להביא מים מנילוס ברגלך ולהשקותה וצריך אתה לנדד משנתך ולעמול, והנמוך שותה ולא הגבוה, ואתה מעלה המים מן הנמוך לגבוה. אבל זו (פסוק יא) למטר השמים תשתה מים אתה ישן על מטתך, והקב"ה משקה נמוך וגבוה, גלוי ושאינו גלוי, כאחת

*Watered by your foot – the land of Egypt required that water be brought from the Nile "with your foot" and in order to water it, you were required to rise from your sleep and to toil; and the lower (places) received water, but not the higher, and you brought up the water from the lower (places) to the higher (places). But this land "that drinks rain from sky" (v. 11); while you sleep upon your bed the Holy One Blessed Be He waters the low (places) and the high, open and hidden (sources of water) at the same time.*

- How would you say this interpretation depicts the relationship of the Children of Israel to the land, and to God?

## Text 3: Ramban on Deuteronomy 11:10

*The Ramban (Nachmanides) (1194-1270) was the foremost halakhist of his age. Like Rambam before him, Nachmanides was a Spaniard who was both a physician and a great Torah scholar.*

*Ramban, writing about a century after Rashi, takes issue with Rashi's reliance on the midrash.*

ופשוטו של מקרא בדרך האזהרות  
נאמר, שאמר להם ושמרתם את כל  
המצווה וירשתם ארץ זבת חלב ודבש  
כי ה' יותן מטר ארצכם בעתו והארץ  
תיתן יבולה, אבל דעו לכם שאינה  
כארץ מצרים להשקות אותה ברגל מן  
היאורים ומן האגמים כגן הירק רק  
היא ארץ הרים ובקעות למטר השמים  
תשתה מים לא בעניין אחר, וצריכה  
שידרוש ה' אותה תמיד במטר, כי היא  
ארץ צמאה מאד וצריכה מטר כל  
השנה, ואם תעברו על רצון ה' ולא  
ידרוש אותה בגשמי רצון הנה היא רעה  
מאד לא תזרע ולא תצמיח ולא יעלה  
בה כל עשב בהריה... כי אם שמוע  
תשמעו אל מצוותי ונתתי מטר ארצכם  
בעתו יורה ומלקוש תמיד.

This verse is said in line with the plain meaning of Scripture by way of warnings (vss. 13-14) But know then that it [the land of Israel] is not like the land of Egypt that you will water it by foot from rivers and lakes and the pools "as a vegetable garden." Instead it is a land of hills and valleys, sucks up water from the sky (vs. 11)", not in any other way. Therefore it requires that God care for it always by giving it rain because it is a very thirsty land and needs rain all year. And if you transgress the will of God, He won't take care of it with abundant rain and this will be very bad: the land won't seed, grow...but "if obey the commandments...I will grant rain in its season..."

- What do you see are the differences and similarities between Ramban's take, and Rashi's?
- Does your appreciation of the land of Israel alter when you are physically there?
- Is it easier to appreciate its 'specialness' from afar, or from near?

# Issue 2:

## The Land of Israel: *A Human Labor of Love?*

### Text 1: A Cosmic Affair

*When we sing in Hatikvah "our land", we are making a collective claim of a relationship between the land and the Jewish People. A. D. Gordon, writing in the early 20th century in Palestine, believed that all of Jewish suffering could be traced to the "parasitic state" of Jews in the Diaspora, who were not connected to the Land of Israel. Gordon believed that working the land of Israel was a sacred task, not only for the individual but for the entire Jewish people: "The Land of Israel is acquired through labor, not through fire and not through blood."*

There is a cosmic element in nationality, which is its basic ingredient. That cosmic element may best be described as the blending of the natural landscape of the Homeland with the spirit of the people inhabiting it. This is the mainspring of a people's vitality and creativity, of its spiritual and cultural values. Any conglomeration of individuals may form a society in the mechanical sense, one that moves and acts, but only the presence of the cosmic element makes for an organic national entity with creative vitality.

Jewish life in the Diaspora lack this cosmic element of national identity; it is sustained by the historic element alone, which keeps us alive, and will not let us die, but it cannot provide us with a full national life. What we have come to find in Palestine is the cosmic element. In the countries of the Exile we are compelled to lead an inanimate existence, lacking in national creativity (and, from the point of view of genuine personality, also lacking in individual creativity)...

A.D. Gordon, 'Our Tasks Ahead' (1920)

- Gordon defines a "full national life" as a driven by the 'cosmic element' of a people connected to its land. Do you agree with this definition?
- What does living a "full national life" mean to you?
- Does Gordon's description of Jewish life outside of Israel resonate with you in any way, or do you reject his approach?

## Text 2: A Grand Projection

*Award winning Israeli author Meir Shalev's first novel "The Blue Mountain" tells the story of the settlement of the Jezreel Valley through the eyes of a 40 year-old former moshavnik whose grandfather was an early pioneer of the valley.*

"The vulgar earth must have split its sides laughing at the sight of us pioneers kissing and watering it with our tears of thanksgiving," ...He now understood how easily the earth shook off whatever trivial images men cloaked it in. "Why, it's nothing but a tissue of poor fictions, anyway, the earth!" he exclaimed. "A thin crust beneath which is nothing but pure selfishness."

*Meir Shalev - The Blue Mountain (1988)*

- Do you agree with the insight that no piece of earth has any intrinsic value beyond that which people give it?
- Do you feel that way about the United States?
- Do you feel that way about the land of Israel?

## Text 3:

*Often considered the Bob Dylan of the Israeli folk scene, Meir Ariel died in 1999.*

על ארץ מוותרים רק בלב  
ארץ עוזבים רק בלב  
ארץ שוכחים רק בלב  
על ארץ מוותרים רק בלב  
רק בלב

A land is forsaken only in the heart.  
A Land is left only in the heart,  
A Land is forgotten only in the heart,  
Only in the Heart.

הארץ הזאת כבר החליפה  
עמים ואומות כשמלה  
כמו תכשיטים רק שומרת  
על השמות שקיבלה

This land has already switched  
Peoples and nations like a dress,  
Like jewelry she only keeps  
The names she received.

החליפה אותי פעמיים  
כמעט שהייתי אחר  
אך לי אלף שנים ועוד אלף  
שלא מוותר על גרגר

She has changed me twice  
So I was almost different  
But I have a thousand years and another  
thousand,  
So I will not give up on a thing.

החליפה אותי איך ולמה  
איך למה לא שמתי לב  
כמו שדרכת עליה  
ככה גם לא שמתי לב

She has changed me without reason,  
How could I not have paid attention?  
Just like as when I trod on her,  
I did not pay attention.

רק מידי נשמטה לי  
מיד נלכדה בלבי  
ובלבי אחזתיה  
שלא תשכח ימיני

Yet the minute she slipped from my grasp  
She was captured in my heart,  
And in my heart I held her,  
So I would not forget my right hand.

כי תמצא לך ארץ  
ותהיה בה אזרח  
לך איתה בדרך ארץ  
שמע מאחד שסרח

Go and find yourself a land,  
And be a citizen to her,  
Walk with her in the way of the land,  
Take it from one who sins.

ארץ אוהבת קצת יחס  
ארץ רוצה תשומת לב  
לא משנה מי ומה אתה  
ארץ רוצה תשומת לב

A Land loves a relationship,  
A Land wants caring for,  
It doesn't matter who or what you are,

כי על ארץ מוותרים רק בלב	Land only wants caring for.
ארץ עוזבים רק בלב	For a land is forsaken only in the heat,
ארץ שוכחים רק בלב	A Land is left only in the heart,
על ארץ מוותרים רק בלב	A Land is forgotten only in the heart, Only in the heart.

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2RA\\_YVZ0Ypk](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2RA_YVZ0Ypk)

- What do you think Meir Ariel is trying to say in this song?
- What is the power of the Land of Israel according to this song?
- Is there something special about the Jewish people's relationship to the land?
- Have you ever left a land, only in your heart?

## Text 4: Kobi Oz Nikbat Hashiloach

View: [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iXMgWTe\\_sl4](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iXMgWTe_sl4)

- *Nikbat HaShiloach is an underground waterway (sometimes known as Shiloah, or Shiloah) fashioned in the days of Ezekiel, that acted as the water source for the ancient city of Jerusalem.*
- *The Jewish purification ritual of Mikveh involves naked immersion in natural sourced water.*
- *The Hebrew for 'burst forth' is a play on the word Gichon – the name of the river that feeds Nikbat HaShiloach.*
- *The song plays with the fear of the Jerusalem Syndrome. This is a medically recognized syndrome, where visitors to Jerusalem suddenly are convinced they are Jesus, or King David, or some other historical/mythical hero.*

On my way to the Nikbat HaShiloach  
Want to immerse myself in the living waters  
I'm breathing air from the days of the Kings  
Crawl along your tunnel to the Nikbat haShiloach  
Soon I'll take off my clothes  
Waters are furious, sparkling, mischievous

Crawling in your tunnels, Jerusalem  
Gurgling below, struggles above  
Battling for land and polluting the water  
Perhaps my soul will find rest  
Here in your tunnels Jerusalem  
Maybe I will burst forth  
and find the Kingdom?  
How much of this is megalomania?  
How much is anthropology?  
How much is guilt?  
How much because my world is unclean?

Her lips on the way to the light  
Touching, I am drunk with cold  
When I come out  
Will I be pure?  
Will I have emerged a king or mule?

Get out and towel off the water  
Where did I put my spectacles?  
Feel like myself, thank God  
A crown did not await me, nor donkeys  
My body full of strange sensations  
Not entirely pure and not a savior  
How much of this is megalomania?  
How much of this is anthropology?

How much is guilt?  
How much because my world is unclean?

Her lips face the light  
Touched, I am drunk with cold  
Here, I'm outside  
Not very pure  
I have a feeling I might return

בדרך לנקבת השלוח  
רוצה לטב' ל במים חיים  
נושם אויר מימי המלכים  
זוחל במחילותיך לנקבת השלוח  
עוד מעט אסיר ת'בגדים  
מים שוצפים, רושפים הצופים.

זוחל במחילותיך רושלים  
למטה פכפוך למעלה סכסוך  
נלחמים על אדמה ומזקמים את המים  
אולי נפשי תמצא מנוחה  
כאן במחילותיך רושלים  
אולי אני אגייח ואמצא מלוכה  
כמה מזה מגלומניה?  
כמה מזה אנטרופולוגיה?  
כמה מזה רגשי אשמה?  
כמה מזה כי העולם שלי מלכלך?

שפתיה בדרך אל האור  
נוגע אני שכור מקור  
כשאצא בחוץ  
האם אהיה טהור?  
האם יצאתי מלך או חמור?

יוצא ומנגב את המים  
איפה שמתי את המשקפיים?  
מרגיש כמו עצמי תודה לאל  
כתר ל' א חכה לי וגם ל' א אתונות  
בגוף יש לי תחושות משונות  
ל' א לגמרי טהור וגם ל' א גואל  
כמה מזה מגלומניה?  
כמה מזה אנטרופולוגיה?

כמה מזה רגשי אשמה?  
כמה מזה כי העולם שלי מלכלך?

שפתיה בדרך אל האור  
נוגע אני שכור מקור  
הנה אני בחוץ  
ל' א מא' ד טהור  
יש לי הרגשה שעוד אהזור.

- Are there any places in the world that you feel have an intrinsic power, holiness, specialness?
- Have you ever visited a place that left you transformed in any way?
- Have you ever visited anywhere in Israel with a similar concerned expectation of self-transformation?

Kobi Oz undergoes a powerful experience in the waters, yet in the end he emerges more or less unchanged. Some talk of a visit to Israel as an “immersion” into an intense and overwhelming Jewish experience, yet on return to their Jewish life in the Diaspora – outside of the inspiring “waters” of the Jewish State – they find it difficult to reach such poetic heights.

- Is this similar or different to your feeling on leaving Israel?  
**Kobi Oz considers four motivating factors for why he visits Nikbat HaShiloach: Meglomania, Anthropology, Guilt, and a feeling that his life is dirty.**
- What reason might you offer yourself for visiting Jerusalem?  
How would you say this song sees the connection between the biblical Land of Israel and the modern State of Israel?

How would you say the song expresses the connection between a spiritual Jerusalem, and the humdrum day-to-day Jerusalem (*Yerushalayim shel maalah, Yerushalayim shel matah*)?

# Issue 3:

## *Living in Our Land?*

### Text 1: Rambam, Mishneh Torah

*It is worth bearing in mind the fact that the Rambam himself only spent a few years of his life in Jerusalem, and the rest in Spain and Egypt. His grandson relates that the Rambam would sign his name together with a public acknowledgment that he had made the sinful journey from Israel to Egypt, a reverse Exodus! In this sense, Rambam was integrating his non-living in Israel into his public identity.*

לעולם ידור אדם בארץ ישראל, אפילו בעיר שרובה גויים; ואל ידור בחוצה לארץ, ואפילו בעיר שרובה ישראל: שכל היוצא לחוצה לארץ--כאילו עובד עבודה זרה, שנאמר "כי גירשוני היום מהסתפח בנחלת ה' לאמור לך עבוד אלוהים אחרים.

One should always live in the Land of Israel, even in a town most of whose inhabitants are idolaters, but let no one live outside the Land, even in a town most of whose inhabitants are Israelites; for whoever goes out of the Land of Israel may be regarded as if one who worships idols.

Laws of Kings 5:12 (1135-1204)

- How do you understand Rambam's pronouncement, given that he himself did not live by it?
- Can you relate to his mixed emotions, feeling one ought to live in Israel but not doing so?

## Text 2: What is your homeland like?

I was in the Philippines interviewing members of remote hill tribes about their land and livelihood. On a sweltering day in the forested terrain of a Banwa'on people, a gap-toothed chief showed me the trees, streams and farm plots that his tribe had tended for centuries. It was territory, he insisted, they would defend with their lives. As the sun finally slip lower in the sky, he introduced me to a frail old woman who was revered by the others as a traditional priestess. We sat under a sacred tree near her farm and looked out over the Ma'asam River. She asked through an interpreter, "What is your homeland like?"

She looked at me with an expectant smile, but I was speechless. My eyes dropped. Should I tell her about my neighborhood on the edge of Washington, D.C., the one where I then lived with my wife, Amy, and our son, Gary? The one where we could not let Gary play outside because of the traffic?

She repeated the question, thinking I had not heard. "Tell me about your place." Again, I could not answer. Should I tell her about the neighborhood we had previously fled, the one where the dead bodies of young men kept turning up in the alleyways? The one where police helicopters were always shining their spotlights through our windows? The one that had since erupted in riots and suffered the psychotic nonchalance of a serial killer? I said nothing.

The truth was I lacked any connection to my base in Washington, D.C., and for some reason, for the first time, it shamed me. I had breakfasted with senators and shaken hands with presidents, but I was tongue-tied before this barefoot old woman.

"In America," I finally admitted, "we have careers, not places." Looking up, I recognized pity in her eyes.

*Alan Thein Durning, This Place on Earth*

- How would you answer the question "what is your homeland like?"
- Would you talk about North America?
- Israel?

(Adapted from Hazon's food curriculum, "Food for Thought")

### Overarching Questions:

- From the sources we looked at, which one inspired you to think about your personal connection to the land of Israel? Why?