



PRESERVATION AND DEVELOPMENT IN ZIONIST THOUGHT

Read the quotations and consider the following questions:

- * From an environmental perspective, has Zionism harmed or helped the land of Israel?
- * Is opposition to development anti-Zionist?
- * What is Green Zionism? And is it important?

“We have come to our homeland in order to be planted in our natural soil from which we have been uprooted, to strike our roots deep into its life-giving substances, and to stretch out our branches in the sustaining and creating air and sunlight of our homeland. ... And when you, O human, will return to Nature, that day your eyes will open, you will stare straight into the eyes of Nature and in its mirror you will see your image. You will know... that when you hid from Nature, you hid from yourself. ... We, who have been torn away from nature, who have lost the savor of natural living – if we desire life, we must establish a new relationship with nature.”

“And it shall come to pass that on that day, O child of Adam, that you shall receive a new spirit, you shall feel a new feeling, a new hunger – not a hunger for bread, nor a thirst for money, but for labor. You will find delight in every labor and in every deed that you do., like the delight you take in eating and drinking. On that day, you will take care to make labor pleasurable and appealing, like you now take care to make your food appealing, and like you know take care to increase the fruit of your labor – money. Most of all, though, you will take care to do all your labor and all your deeds in the midst of Nature, in the midst of the Boundless Space of the World. That is how you will do your work in the field and that is how you will do your work in the house, for that is how you will build your house. And it shall come to pass when you work at your labor, that the spacious expanse of the universe will be your workplace, and you and nature the workers. The two of you will be of one heart and of one spirit. ... On that day, the fruit of your labor, child of Adam, will be: Life. For there will be life within your labor. ... On that day, child of Adam, you will know Nature, for your eyes



and all your senses will be sufficiently clear, your heart sufficiently open, your mind sufficiently deep. On that day, the light of your wisdom and your science will no longer be a cold and terrible light, but it will be a living light, flowing abundantly from all of the worlds. On that day, child of Adam, you will know how to live with Nature, for it will be your will to know.”

A.D. Gordon (1856-1922) was born in Lithuania to a religious family. The founder and lead philosopher of the Labor Zionist movement, Gordon moved in 1903 to Israel, where he was a founding member of Kibbutz Degania. After a hard day's labor on the land, Gordon was known to write his essays by candlelight.

“The establishment of a true community cannot come about unless the agrarian life, a life that draws its strength from the soil, is elevated to a service of God and spreads to other social classes, binding them, as it were, to God and to the soil. The laws of spirit are the laws of the soil, correctly understood; they carry out the dictates of a nature that has become humanized and God-directed. Our revolution, the revolutionary settlement, signifies the elective fulfillment of a task with which our tradition has charged us. We must choose in this tradition the elements that constitute closeness to the soil, hallowing worldliness, and absorption of the Divine in nature; and reject in this tradition the elements that constitute remoteness from the soil, detached rationality, and nature's banishment from the presence of God.”

Martin Buber (1878-1965) was born in Vienna and he lived in Germany until he moved to Israel in 1938. His legacy is as a philosopher, mystic, scholar, author, peace activist, translator, socialist, historian and Zionist.

“This land is part of me and I am part of it. My American friends laugh when I tell them that the flowers and trees in Central Park seem fake to me.”

Meron Benvenisti (1931-) was a deputy mayor of Jerusalem from 1971 to 1978.

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“For a long time Zionism embodied an exuberant declaration against the wilderness; it was anti-wasteland, and for ‘making the desert bloom’. ... Making the desert bloom meant doing away with the wasteland, erasing the nothingness, exploiting completely all natural resources. We felt that if we succeeded in doing this thing, if we could conquer the wilderness, do away with it, make it bloom – in other words, if we could settle it, build it up, make it not wild, not devoid of human values – then we would have achieved the Zionist dream. ... In those empty places there is a slow wisdom that surpasses our hasty wisdom – the same slow wisdom of stalactites in the darkness, working in historical harmony. There is in those empty places more balance than in the things that were created only yesterday in order to satisfy our human needs.”

“From certain perspectives, from a perspective of security, from the perspective of Israel’s population, it is clear that there is something impelling in the call to settle every bit of land, even the wasteland. But even here, we return to the same blindness in planning: Wasteland is not just emptiness, and even if it was empty, it is impossible to be without it. Even if it was nothing, it would be impossible without it. More than this: This nothing is as important as the something. There is no something without nothing. Just as there is no opened without closed. No existence without lack of existence. Only in an unrealistic world does something exist without nothing. Accordingly, destruction of the nothing is equivalent to destruction of the something: Destruction of the chance for equilibrium on which the world is built. I propose that in order for humankind to be cultured and civilized, their culture must stand on the border of no culture: in contact with unsettled nature, the uncultivated, one should not be ashamed of lack of culture. That lack of culture is not a swamp. And a swamp ... is not always something that you must destroy and eliminate. The negative connotation of a swamp, or of the desert, as if they are not humane places, is something of a distortion, an un-ripe idea. With time, this misconception will pass.”

S. Yizhar (1916-2006) was an Israeli writer, poet and politician. He was elected to the first seating of the Knesset and he also taught at writing at Harvard University and education at Hebrew University.

“From the slopes of the Lebanon to the Dead Sea,
We shall cultivate you with our plows,
We shall plant for you and build for you,
We shall beautify you greatly.

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We shall clothe you in a robe of cement and concrete
And spread out carpeted gardens for you.
Upon the redeemed soil of your fields
The grain will peel out joyously.”

Natan Alterman: A Song to Moledet

“The tasks that lie ahead will require pioneering efforts the likes of which we have never known, for we must conquer and fructify the waste places (in the mountains of Galilee, the plains of the Negev, the valley of the Jordan, the sand dunes of the seashore, and the mountains of Judea) ... First of all, we must conquer the sea and the desert, for these will provide us with room for new settlers and will serve as a laboratory for the development of new forms of economic and agricultural endeavor. Unless we conquer both the sea and the desert – by creating Jewish sailors and even Jewish Bedouin tribes – we cannot succeed in the tasks of immigration and resettlement that we must shoulder after the war. ... This combination will enable them to find a way of making the wilderness bloom and turning the desert into a place of settled habitation.”

“Jewish society needs the Negev and it must bring its people here. This is where a specifically Jewish effort to open the frontiers of the mind and develop the natural capacities of the Promised Land can make its contribution. The supreme test of Israel at this time in its history lies not in the struggle with hostile forces outside its frontiers but in its success in wresting fertility from the wasteland that constitutes 60 percent of its territory. ... The Negev offers the Jews their greatest opportunity to accomplish everything for themselves from the very beginning. This is a vital part of our redemption in Israel. For in the end, as man gains mastery over nature he gains it also over himself. That is the sense, and not a mystical but a practical one, in which I define our redemption here.”

“If the state does not liquidate the desert, the desert may liquidate the state.”

David Ben-Gurion (1886-1973) was the first prime minister of the modern state of Israel.

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“They talk about clean air and natural resources and that’s all very important. But on the other side, there is development. I mean why have we come here anyway? To bring the Jewish people here back to the land of Israel. To do this we need development. Ultimately, in the name of development, I am willing to sacrifice anything.”

Yitzhak Shamir (1915-) was the prime minister of Israel from 1983-1984 and 1986-1992.

“And now it is my turn for a terrible confession. I object to nature preservation. The very ideal of ‘preservation’ is not acceptable in almost any area of life. We have not come into this world to protect or preserve any given thing, mitzvah, nature or cultural heritage. ... We have not inherited a museum, to patiently wipe off the dust from its displays or to polish the glass. ... Nature also is not a museum. One is allowed to touch, allowed to move, to draw closer, to change and to leave our stamp. ... Touch the stone. Touch the animal. Touch your fellow man. On one condition. How to touch? To answer ‘on one leg’ and in a word I would say: ‘with love.’ ”

Amos Oz (1937-) was born in Jerusalem. Today he is Israel’s most renowned author. His writing challenges the notion of order and decency in Israeli society. He’s also a leading activist in Peace Now.

“Israel’s constantly growing population in the north is running out of space, and the Negev is a massive land reserve waiting to be developed. In the Hebrew calendar 5764 alone, Israel’s population grew by 143,000 newborn babies, plus 22,000 new immigrants. Grasp the economic, demographic and geographic realities of Israel, and you will understand the immediate need to develop the Negev. Over the next five years, our goal is to bring 250,000 new residents to the Negev. And over the next ten years, Blueprint Negev will bring over 500,000 people to 100,000 housing sites that will be created in 25 new communities.”

Jewish National Fund’s Blueprint Negev

“Pioneers frequently perceived the natural world as challenging, hostile wilderness to be tamed through diligent Jewish settlement. Songs extolling production, the beauty of concrete, and the importance of construction became part of a nationalistic liturgy. While

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Israeli Zionists were certainly not unaware of the splendor of the land of Israel, the task of nation building dominated their senses.”

Dr. Alon Tal is Israel's leading environmentalist. He co-founded the Israel Union for Environmental Defense, the Arava Institute for Environmental Studies and the Green Zionist Alliance.

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