

Love, Doubt, Early Debates

The Place Where We Are Right

by Yehuda Amichai, trans. Stephen Mitchell

From the place where we are right
Flowers will never grow
In the spring.

The place where we are right
Is hard and trampled
Like a yard.

But doubts and loves
Dig up the world
Like a mole, a plow.
And a whisper will be heard in the place
Where the ruined
House once stood.

המקום שבו אנו צודקים

מן המקום שבו אנו צודקים.
לא יצמחו לעולם
פרחים באביב.

המקום שבו אנו צודקים
הוא רמוס וקשה
כמו חצר.

אבל ספקות ואהבות עושים
את העולם לתחוח
כמו חפרפרת, כמו חריש.
ולחישה תשמע במקום
שבו היה הבית
אשר נחרב.

DISCUSSION INSTRUCTIONS:

- 1) Read the poem aloud
- 2) Each person, please answer the following questions. As one person speaks, the other should just listen. Do not interrupt or offer your opinion in response. If you have a clarifying question, feel free to ask. After the first person finishes, then the next person shares. You can share both answers at once, or take turns, each doing the first and then the second.

QUESTIONS:

- a) What is a "love" that feels important or relevant to you in connection to Zionism, to Israel, to Palestine?
- b) What is a "doubt" that is up for you right now, that you are struggling with or want to explore?

Spiritual, Leftwing Zionism

“Planted in our natural soil” – A.D. Gordon

There is a cosmic element in nationality which is its basic ingredient. That cosmic element may be best 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...What, essentially, is the purpose of our national movement? What do we expect to find in Palestine that no other place can give us? Why should we segregate ourselves from the nations among whom we have lived our lives? Why leave the lands of our birth, which have fashioned our personalities and so largely influenced our spirits? Why should we not share full and unreservedly with those nations in their great work for the progress of mankind? In other words, why should we not completely assimilate ourselves among those nations? What stops us?

Surely it is not religion. In our day it is quite possible to live without any religion at all...The answer is that there is a force within every one of us which is fighting for its own life - which seeks its own realization...Jewish life in the Diaspora lacks 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 only in Palestine is the cosmic element... We 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 substance.....As we now come to re-establish our path among the ways of living nations of the earth, we must make sure that we find the right path. We must create a new people, a human people whose attitude toward other peoples is informed with the sense of human brotherhood and whose attitude toward nature and all within it is inspired by noble urges of life-loving creativity. All the forces of our history, all the pain that has accumulated in our national soul, seem to impel us in that direction... We are engaged in a creative endeavor the like of which is itself not to be found in the whole history of mankind: the rebirth and rehabilitation of a people that has been uprooted and scattered to the winds...

(Aaron David Gordon, “Our Tasks Ahead,” 1920 – born 1856, died 1922, the founder of Hapoel Hatzair, associated with Labor Zionism. He moved to Ottoman Palestine in 1904, at the age of 48, and supported himself as a hired agricultural hand. Gordon refused to become involved in Zionist political parties, out of principle. He believed Jewish suffering could be traced to the “parasitic” state of Jews in the diaspora who were unable to participate in creative labor. To remedy this, he sought to promote physical labor and agriculture as a means of uplifting Jews spiritually. He also believed that working the land was a sacred task for the entire Jewish people. He wrote: “The Land of Israel is acquired through labor, not through fire and not through blood.”)

“Living heart and center” – Martin Buber

Dispersion is bearable. It can even be purposeful if somewhere there is ingathering, a growing home center, a piece of earth where one is in the midst of an ingathering and not in dispersion...When there is this, there is also a striving, common life, the life of a community

that dares to live today because it hopes to live tomorrow. But when this growing center, this increasing process of ingathering is lacking, dispersion becomes dismemberment. On this criterion, the question of our Jewish destiny is indissolubly bound up with the possibility of ingathering, and this in Palestine.

You ask, "Why should they not, like other nations of the earth, make that country where they are born and where they earn their livelihood their home?" Because their destiny is different from that of all other nations of the earth. It is a destiny that in truth and justice should not be imposed on any nation on earth. For their destiny is dispersion - not the dispersion of a fraction and the preservation of the main substance, as in the case of other nations. It is dispersion without the living heart and center, and every nation has a right to demand the possession of a living heart. It is different, because a hundred adopted homes without one original and natural one render a nation sick and miserable. It is different, because, although the wellbeing and the achievement of the individual may flourish on stepmother soil, the nation as such must languish. And just as you, Mahatma, wish that not only should all Indians be able to live and work, but that also Indian substance, Indian wisdom, and Indian truth should prosper and be fruitful, so do we wish this for the Jews. For you, there is no need to be aware that the Indian substance could not prosper without the Indian's attachment to the mother soil and without his ingathering there. But we know what is essential. We know it because it is just this that is denied us or was, at least, up to the generation that has just begun to work at the redemption of the mother soil.

(Martin Buber, letter to Mahatma Gandhi, February 1939. Buber lived from 1868-1965, and was a German Jewish philosopher and political radical. He joined the Zionist movement in 1898 and moved to Jerusalem, in Mandatory Palestine, in 1938, after the Nazis came to power. Within the Zionist movement, beginning in the 1920s, he advocated for a binational Jewish-Arab state, and was a founder of Brit Shalom in 1925, a group of Jewish intellectuals committed to bi-nationalism; in 1942 they founded Ihud, a political party committed to bi-nationalism.)

Revisionist Zionism

"To save millions" - Vladimir Jabotinsky

The conception of Zionism which I have the honor to represent here is based on what I should call the humanitarian aspect. By that I do not mean to say that we do not respect the other, the purely spiritual aspects of Jewish nationalism, such as the desire for self-expression, the rebuilding of a Hebrew culture, or creating some "model community of which the Jewish people could be proud." All that, of course, is most important; but as compared with our actual needs and our real position in the world to-day, all that has rather the character of luxury... We are facing an elemental calamity, a kind of social earthquake. Three generations of Jewish thinkers and Zionists have given much thought to

analyzing the Jewish position and have come to the conclusion that the cause of our suffering is the very fact of the "Diaspora," the bedrock fact that we are everywhere a minority. It is not the anti-Semitism of men; it is, above all, the anti-Semitism of things, the inherent xenophobia of the body social or the body economic under which we suffer. Of course, there are ups and downs; but there are moments, there are whole periods in history when this "xenophobia of life itself" takes dimensions which no people can stand, and that is what we are facing now....[T]he phenomenon called Zionism may include all kinds of dreams—a "model community," Hebrew culture, perhaps even a second edition of the bible—but all this longing for wonderful toys of velvet and silver is nothing in comparison with that tangible momentum of irresistible distress and need by which we are propelled and borne...

Whenever I hear the Zionist, most often my own Party, accused of asking for too much — Gentlemen, I really cannot understand it. Yes, we do want a State; every nation on earth, every normal nation, beginning with the smallest and the humblest who do not claim any merit, any role in humanity's development, they all have States of their own. That is the normal condition for a people. Yet, when we, the most abnormal of peoples and therefore the most unfortunate, ask only for the same condition as the Albanians enjoy, to say nothing of the French and the English, then it is called too much... I would remind you of the commotion which was produced in that famous institution when Oliver Twist came and asked for "more"... What Oliver Twist really meant was this: "Will you just give me that normal portion which is necessary for a boy of my age to be able to live." I assure you that you face here to-day, in the Jewish people with its demands, an Oliver Twist who has, unfortunately, no concessions to make. What can be the concessions? We have got to save millions, many *millions*. (testimony before the British House of Lords, 1937)

Our attitude toward the Palestinian Arabs is determined by the full recognition of an objective fact: even after the formation of a Jewish majority a considerable Arab population will always remain in Palestine. If things fare badly for this group of inhabitants then things will fare badly for the entire country. The political, economic and cultural welfare of the Arabs will thus always remain one of the main conditions for the well-being of the land of Israel. In the future Jewish state absolute equality will reign between residents of both peoples, both languages and all religions... It is a dangerous falsehood, however, to present such a reconciliation as an already existing fact. Arab public opinion in Palestine is against the creation of a Jewish majority there. The Arabs will continue to fight for a long time... against all that which leads to the creation of this majority until the moment that the overwhelming might of the Jews in the country, i.e. the Jewish majority, becomes a fact. Only then will true reconciliation commence. To close our eyes to this state of affairs is unwise and irresponsible. We Revisionists are keeping our eyes open and want to be prepared for every eventuality. With all the sincere goodwill we feel toward the Arab people, we nevertheless firmly believe that the transformation of Palestine into a Jewish state is a postulate of the highest justice and that all opposition to it is unjust. One may neither come to terms with injustice or make any concessions to it. ("What the Zionist Revisionists Want," 1926)

(Vladimir Jabotinsky was born in Russia in 1880, and died in 1940. He founded the Jewish Self-Defense Organization in Russia following the Kishinev pogroms, and fought with the British against the Ottoman Empire during World War I with the Jewish Legion in Palestine. In 1923 he left the mainstream Zionist movement and founded the Alliance of Revisionist Zionists and a paramilitary youth movement, Betar. He advocated for a Jewish state on both banks of the Jordan in which the Arab minority would have full equal rights, but only after the Jews had established their majority through force. The Likud party is the ideological heir to the Revisionists.)

Religious Zionism

“The combination of religion with nationality” – Yehiel Michael Pines

I have no sympathy with the currently fashionable idea, with the movement to make the Jewish people a pure secular nationality in place of the combination of religion with nationality that has enabled us to survive to this day. Whatever merit there may be to this theory, it is to be found only in its possible value as applied to assimilated Jews, that is, to those de-Judaized individuals who have remained members of the Jewish faith in name only and are ready to drop out of the Jewish community. Such Jews may find in the idea of secular Jewish nationality a new bond to reinforce their attachment to the Jewish people. ...

Any other people can perhaps have a national aspiration divorced from its religion, but we Jews cannot. Such nationalism is an abomination to Jews. Moreover, it cannot succeed, since it has no roots in our reality. What is Jewish nationality divorced from Jewish religion? It is an empty formula, nothing but pretty phrases. After all, what is nationality if not a concept, or, in other words, a thought-image. But a thought-image which has no basis in reality is an illusion. What other basis in reality can there be for the thought-image of Jewish nationality except the unity of the Jewish people with its Torah and its faith?

(Yehiel Michael Pines – lived 1824-1913, early religious Zionist writer and thinker, born in Russia and settling in Jerusalem in 1878)

“The hope for the Redemption” – Abraham Isaac Kook

Eretz Israel [the Land of Israel] is not something apart from the soul of the Jewish people; it is no mere national possession, serving as a means of unifying our people and buttressing its material, or even its spiritual survival. Eretz Israel is part of the very essence of our nationhood; it is bound organically to its very life and inner being. Human reason, even at its most sublime, cannot begin to understand the unique holiness of Eretz Israel; it cannot stir the depths of love for the land that are dormant within our people... To regard Eretz Israel as merely a tool for establishing our national unity—or even for sustaining our religion in the Diaspora by preserving its proper character and its faith, piety, and observances—is a sterile notion; it is unworthy of the holiness of Eretz Israel. A valid strengthening of Judaism in the Diaspora can come only from a deepened attachment to

Eretz Israel. The hope for the return to the Holy Land is the continuing source of the distinctive nature of Judaism. The hope for the Redemption is the force that sustains Judaism in the Diaspora; the Judaism of Eretz Israel is the very Redemption...

It is a grave error to be insensitive to the distinctive unity of the Jewish spirit, to imagine that the Divine stuff which uniquely characterizes Israel is comparable to the spiritual content of all the other national civilizations. This error is the source of the attempt to sever the national from the religious element in Judaism. Such a division would falsify both our nationalism and our religion, for every element of thought, emotion, and idealism that is present in the Jewish people belongs to an indivisible entity, and all together make up its specific character... Apart from the nourishment it receives from the life-giving dew of the holiness of Eretz Israel, Jewry in the Diaspora has no real foundation and lives only by the power of a vision and by the memory of our glory, i.e. by the past and the future. But there is a limit to the power of such a vision to carry the burden of life and to give direction to the career of a people... The real and organic holiness of Jewry can become manifest only by the return of the people to its land, the only path that can lead to its renascence. Whatever is sublime in our spirit and our vision can live only to the degree that there will be a tangible life to reinvigorate the tiring dream.

(Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook, 1865-1935; born in Russia, he became the first Ashkenazi Chief Rabbi of Palestine in 1921. He broke with most other Orthodox religious leaders of the time in his appreciation of the secular Zionist movement, even though he believed that Jewish religion should retain primacy over the political project. The writings of his son, Zvi Yehudah Kook, inspired Gush Emunim, the post-1967 religious Zionist settler movement.)

Bi-National Zionism

"The Case for a Bi-National Palestine" - Hashomer Hatzair

The subject of this memorandum is an attempt to outline a policy for Palestine which, while providing for the ultimate fulfillment of the respective Jewish-Zionist and Arab aspirations is the only one, in our opinion, likely to lead to Jewish-Arab cooperation and to peace and prosperity in this country... [We hold that] a state is not an end in itself. In its political implications it is only an instrument whereby a people seeks to insure its national welfare and felicity. Assuming that millions of Jews could be saved from their present distress, enabled to build "their own body social in Palestine undisturbed by anyone," yet in no way affect or violate either the Palestine Arabs' "profound attachment to their soil and culture" or their motive of "self-preservation and self-determination"; assuming, furthermore, that adequate safeguards to that effect could be agreed upon and their practicality demonstrated, we fail to see what meaning the controversy of a Jewish *versus* an Arab State would then still possess and why it could not be resolved instead in a form which might be termed a Jewish-Arab state... It must be fully grasped and appreciated once and for all that neither in justice nor in practice can either Jews or Arabs maintain exclusive sovereignty over the country. Sovereignty can however, be exercised *jointly and equally* to

the benefit of all concerned. It is this *joint sovereignty* which we have laid down as an essential principal in our efforts to formulate a solution...

With this in mind, we propose that that for the next twenty or twenty-five years Palestine should be placed under the administration of a Special Development Authority, the specific objective of which would be:

- 1) To promote the settlement in Palestine of at least two to three million Jews by developing the economic possibilities of the country to full capacity.
- 2) To raise the standard of living and education of the Palestinian Arabs to approximately the present Jewish level during the same period.
- 3) To promote and actively encourage Jewish-Arab cooperation in every field and by every legitimate means available as well as to encourage the gradual development of self-governing institutions, local and national, on bi-national lines, until the state of full independence within the framework of a bi-national constitution is reached.

...The other alternative...is to partition Palestine between the Jews and the Arabs. The protagonists of the partition plan cherish the illusion that certain Jewish and Arab circles favor partition as the "lesser evil" so that their support, or at least their acquiescence, might be gained. They overlook the fact that what these Jews and Arabs respectively have in mind is a "good" partition—"good" meaning favorable to their own point of view. But there is no partition that would be "good" for Jews and Arabs at one and the same time. If it were "good" for the Jews, it would rally *all* the Arabs against it, and vice versa...

It must always be remembered that the reason for any partition would be that "Jews and Arabs will not cooperate." If they could not cooperate in a single Palestine, how would they ever do so across frontiers which each would regard as the burning wounds in their national life?? The premise, then, that conflict between Jews and Arabs is inevitable, would not be removed by partition. On the contrary, partition would only project it into the future by fixing and amplifying its causes. By eliminating the unpromising alternatives, once more we reach our original conclusions: that there is no other way out of the deadlock save through a system calculated to bring the Jews and the Arabs together...

(Hashomer Hatzair was a political party in Palestine associated with the youth movement of the same name; it established a number of kibbutzim, and after the formation of the state of Israel, entered the ruling coalition with the Labor Party. This position paper was published in 1945.)

Zionism and "Zionism" – Martin Buber

From the beginning, modern Zionism contained two basic tendencies which were opposed to each other in the most thoroughgoing way...The self-realizing tendency says: we wish to return to the earth in order to acquire the natural foundations of human life which make the spirit real. We do not wish to return to any land whatsoever, but to that land in which we first grew up, since it alone may arouse historical and meta-historical forces into action...This land is not, today, devoid of inhabitants, as it was not in those times in which

our nation trod upon it as they burst forth out of the desert. But today we will not tread upon it as conquerors...Not as in ancient days, today we are permitted to enter into an alliance with the inhabitants in order to develop the land together and make it a pathfinder in the Near East—a covenant of two independent nations with equal rights, each of whom is its own master in its own society and culture, but both united in the enterprise of developing their common homeland and in the federal management of shared matters...

...In contrast to this view of Zionism, the “protective” tendency makes only one demand: sovereignty...[This resulted in] a program of tearing off [partition]. That is to say, tearing one part of the land away from the rest, and in the torn off portion—establishing a majority, and the thing’s name would be a Jewish State...The life-concept of “independence” was replaced by the administrative concept of “sovereignty.” The watchword of peace was exchanged for that of struggle.

(Martin Buber lived from 1868-1965, and was a German Jewish philosopher and political radical. He joined the Zionist movement in 1898 and moved to Jerusalem, in Mandatory Palestine, in 1938, after the Nazis came to power. Within the Zionist movement, beginning in the 1920s, he advocated for a binational Jewish-Arab state, and was a founder of Brit Shalom in 1925, a group of Jewish intellectuals committed to bi-nationalism; in 1942 they founded Ihud, a political party committed to bi-nationalism. He published this essay two weeks after Israel’s declaration of independence in 1948, in opposition to the goal of political sovereignty and the “normalization” of the Jewish nation as a nation among nations.)

All sources but the Martin Buber selections from The Jew In the Modern World: A Documentary History, edited by Paul Mendes-Flohr and Jehuda Reinharz, Oxford University Press 1995. Martin Buber selections from A Land of Two Peoples: Martin Buber on Jews and Arabs, edited by Paul Mendes-Flohr, University of Chicago Press 1983.