Learning and Discussion Sheet
On Settling the Land

Vayikra (Leviticus) 25:23: The land shall not be sold for ever; for the land is mine; for you are strangers and sojourners with me.

Sifra (bahar, ch. 3): When it [the land] will be Mine (G-d's), it will be yours (man's).

Tehillim (Psalms) 24:1: A psalm of David. The earth is the L-rd's, and the fullness thereof; the world, and they that dwell in it.

Tehillim (Psalms) 115:16: The heavens belong to the L-rd, and the earth He has given to the children of Adam.

Vayikra (Leviticus) Rabbah (25:3): Rabbi Yehudah be Shimon began his discourse with the text, "After the Lord your G-d shall ye walk" (Devariim 12:5). But can a man of flesh and blood walk after the Holy One, blessed be he(?)… But in truth the Holy On, blessed be He, from the very beginning of the creation of the world, was before all else occupied with plantation, as is proved by the text, "And theLord G-d planted a garden in the first instance in Eden" (Bereshit 2:8), and so do you also, when you enter into the land, occupy yourselves first with nought else but plantation; hence it is written, "And when ye shall come into the land, then ye shall plant."
Yesha'yahu (Isaiah) 45:18: For thus says the Lord that created the heavens; G-d himself that formed the earth and made it; he has established it, he did not create it a waste land, he formed to be inhabited: I am the Lord, and there is none else.

Babylonian Talmud, Chagigah 2b: "He did not create it a waste land, he formed it to be inhabited", specifically for tikkun olam (repairing the world).

Shulhan Arukh, Hoshen Mishpat 175:26: An interested party desires to buy property in order to build houses, and the owner of adjoining property desires the (same) property in order to plant crops—the interested party has first rights to purchasing the property because of "yishuv ha'aretz" ("settling the land") and we are not concerned with the (presumed first rights of) the owner of adjoining property. And there are some (hallakhik decisors) who say that if the owner of adjoining property wants to plant trees, he may be take precedents.

Sm'a (on the preceding source): "...because of 'yishuv ha'aretz'..." (that is to say,) that everything which has greater permanence and is more established in the land better fulfills "yishuv" ("settlement"), houses are more established then crops, and trees are more established and remain in the earth longer than houses. And this hallakhik ruling is also practiced in hutz l'aretz (outside of the land of Israel)...

Discussion questions:
1. Who owns the world, G-d or people? What is humanity’s role in relationship to the land?
2. The idea of settling the land has ancient Jewish roots and many modern applications. Why do you think “settling the land” has been considered such a value in Jewish thought over time?
3. When we settle the land, what is the human relationship to G-d? If it’s not Shabbos, you may find it helpful to have participants draw a diagram that shows their view of the relationship between G-d, people, and the land.

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