

Zionism and the Land of Israel

Two views on preservation, development and the value of nature

The next two pages contain an assortment of passages of Zionist and Israeli thinkers reflecting on the role of Zionism in developing the Land of Israel. Read the passages and consider the following questions:

1. From an environmental perspective, has Zionism harmed or helped the land of Israel?
 2. Is opposition to development anti-Zionist?
 3. What is "Green/Eco Zionism" and is such a thing possible? Important?
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PRESERVATION

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 turned away from Nature -- if we desire life, we must establish a new relationship with Nature.

---- A.D. Gordon, *Mivhar Ketavim*

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 S. Yizhar, *Hearing the roots grow*

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.

---- Meiron Benvenisti, Former Deputy Mayor of Jerusalem

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

DEVELOPMENT

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.

---- Natan Alterman, *A Song to Moledet*

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.

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... 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.

---- David Ben-Gurion, 1944

If the state does not liquidate the desert - the desert may liquidate the state.

---- David Ben Gurion, Sede Boker, 1955

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.

---- Yitzhack Shamir, Former Prime minister of Israel

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, Author