

Our Homelands

Where should we as Diaspora Jews commit our environmental energies?

Currently, most of the world's Jews still live in Diaspora, even though the State of Israel has been in existence for more than 60 years. Jewish prayer and spirituality is focused on Jerusalem and Israel, yet most Jews choose not to move to our ancestral homeland.

Use these sources and questions below to help explore our relationship to land and answer the following overarching questions:

- 1) What is our connection/responsibility as Jews to land?
- 2) Does our connection/responsibility to land end at the borders of Israel or do we have a spiritual, moral or legal obligation to the lands on which we live as well? How do these obligations differ?

Israel, Our Ancestral Homeland

David Ben-Gurion,

"No city in the world, not even Athens or Rome, ever played as great a role in the life of a nation for so long a time, as Jerusalem has done in the life of the Jewish people."

Psalms 137:5-6

"If I forget you, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget its skill! If I do not remember you, let my tongue cling to the roof of my mouth-- if I do not exalt Jerusalem above my chief joy.

Misnah

Erets Yisrael is the navel of the world, and Jerusalem is its center, and the Bet ha Mikdash is at the center of Jerusalem, and the Holy of Holies is at its center, and the Holy Ark is at the center of the Holy of holies, and in front of it is the Foundation Stone on which the world was founded.

A.D Gordon

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 it's life giving substances, and to stretch out our branches in the sustaining and creating air and sunlight of our homeland

Discussion Questions:

- 1) *What is special about the land of Israel?*
- 2) *Why and how are we connected to it?*
- 3) *How central is Israel to modern Jewish life?*
- 4) *Do we need the 'sustaining and creating air and sunlight of our homeland' to thrive as Jews? Why or why not?*

North America, The Land of Our Homes

Rabbi Elimelech of Lyzhansk

Wherever people stand is holy ground. Whatever spot you occupy can be sanctified to G-d.

Genesis 28:16

Sure God is in this place and I, I did not know.

Shemot (Exodus) 3:5

And God said from beyond the burning bush, 'Do not come closer. Remove your sandals from your feet, for the place whereon you stand is holy ground.'

B'reshit (Genesis) Rabbah 13:3

Three things are of equal importance: earth, humans, and rain...each word [in Hebrew] has three letters to teach us that without earth, there is no rain, and without rain, the earth cannot endure, and without either, humanity cannot exist.

Rebbe Shneour Zalman (1745-1813) Tanya 42

All that we see, the heaven, the Earth, and all that fills it. All these things are the external garments of God.

Midrash Kohelet (Ecclesiastes) Rabbah 7:20

Upon creating the first human beings, God guided them around the Garden of Eden, saying; 'Look at my creations! See how beautiful and perfect they are! I created everything for you. Make sure you don't ruin or destroy My world. If you do, there will be no one after you to fix it.'

Discussion Questions:

- 1) Can holiness exist in land outside Israel?
- 2) *As Diaspora Jews, is our responsibility to the Earth and the environment any different than if we lived in Israel?*
- 3) *What does it mean that your home can be 'sanctified to G-d'?*
- 4) *What privileges and responsibilities come with that sanctification?*