

Am Yisrael Chai!

“Homeland - The Land Of Israel and The State of Israel”

Lincoln Square Synagogue, Adar 1 5784, Feb. 2024



The Divine Promise

וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל-אַבְרָם לֵדָלוּק מֵאַרְצְךָ וּמִמּוֹלַדְתְּךָ וּמִבְּיַת אָבִיךָ אֶל-הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר אֵרְאֶה:

Now the Lord said to Avram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, to the land that I will show thee:

Berishit 12,1

וַיְהִי־הָאָמֵר אֶל-אַבְרָם אַחֲרֵי הַפָּרְדֵּ-לוֹט מֵעֵמוֹ שָׂא נָא עֵינֶיךָ וּרְאֵה מִן-הַמָּקוֹם
אֲשֶׁר-אַתָּה שָׁם צֹפֵנָה וְנֹגֵפָה וְקֹדֶמָה וְיָמָה:

כִּי אֶת-כָּל-הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר-אַתָּה רֹאֶה לִךָ אֶתְנַנֶּה וְלִזְרַעְךָ עַד-עוֹלָם:
וְשִׁמְתִי אֶת-זְרַעְךָ כַּעֲפָר הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר וְאִם-יִוְכַל אִישׁ לְמַנּוֹת אֶת-עֲפָר הָאָרֶץ
גַּם-זְרַעְךָ יִמָּנֶה:

And the Lord said to Avram, after Lot was separated from him, Lift up now thy eyes, and look from the place where thou art, northward, and southward, and eastward, and westward;

for all the land which thou seest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed for ever.

And I will make thy seed as the dust of the earth: so that if a man can number the dust of the earth, then shall thy seed also be numbered.

Berishit 13; 14-16

Why THIS Land?

Mystical

Just as some countries yield more agricultural produce than others, and some countries produce more silver, gold and precious stones than others, so too all types of perfection flow from this country. Therefore, it is called "the city of justice," because justice grows there, as do other types of perfection. The sanctity of the land is not like that of other lands; it also has a divine element... Those who reside in its pure air will day and night be surrounded by holy things.

Rabbi Shlomo Alkabetz, Brit Ha-Levi, Teshuva, Third Principle, 41

Homeland

Rather, the love for the Land is rooted in holiness. The holiness of this land – in which God is [readily] found – is the same holiness that is inside of us. It is an inheritance located in our souls, which we received from Avraham, after he overcame the test of lech lecha [in which he had to leave his home, his birthplace, and his country to come the Land of Israel]

Rabbi Eliyahu Dessler, Michtav M'Eliyahu

Difficult Land

It was on the very place on which the degeneration of mankind appeared in the highest degree that God allowed the return of his Shechina to occur...There where an Abraham lived murderers can also live, and the same soil can bear a prophet next to a murderer. It was just that land which is so seductive that on it its inhabitants became so debauched in voluptuous luxury that the very land itself "spued them out", just that land God chose to plant therein His People - who themselves are not the most tractable, whose fundamental character is that of 'a stiff necked people'. So that if the Divine Fire of Torah would succeed - as it did succeed - in winning over this people on this land to itself, then there can be no race of mankind in no land whatsoever who can not be won to (Torah).

R Samson Raphael Hirsh to Bereshit 12,6

The Nature of The Land

What should a modern reader make of these ancient and medieval sources' insistence on the special climatic conditions of the Land of Israel that supposedly make the weather uniquely sensitive to our prayers and good deeds? In a fascinating Hebrew book published in 2011, Pinchas Alpert, a professor of atmospheric physics and former head of the Porter School of Environmental Studies at Tel Aviv University, mapped the weather systems in the Northern Hemisphere for January, the middle of Israel's rainy season. Alpert discovered, to his surprise, that there is indeed something highly unusual about Israel's climate. The country is situated on a "saddle point," a point of disequilibrium between four weather systems. To the northwest there is a low-pressure system associated with rainy weather, around Europe. To the southeast,

there is another low-pressure, rainy area associated with India. In between these are two high-pressure systems associated with dry weather, one to the northeast of Israel over Turkey and central Asia and one southwest around the Sahara Desert.

This is a forecaster's nightmare. Alpert discovered only one comparable weather system on earth, and it is located at a longitude 180 degrees west, over an uninhabited area of the Pacific Ocean, leading Alpert to muse, much like Ramban before him:

Maybe this is one reason why God chose this place to be the land of the Jewish people . . . here people are conscious of the vital need for rain. They do not feel security in having "enough" rain. We do not have water channels like the Nile Delta in Egypt. We are entirely dependent upon rain and it is "easy" for God to alter the delicate synoptic balance this way or that, in accordance with the behavior of the Jewish people. In Israel, God keeps us in a permanent state of wakefulness.

Whether or not we agree with his suggestion that God manipulates the weather of Israel behind a veil of chaotic climate systems, Alpert's research is striking corroboration of the talmudic rabbis' observation that there is something uniquely precarious about our relationship to water in Israel.

Rabbi Julian Sinclair.

Land Apart

And now we begin to understand how Judaism was born. Judaism was born as a protest against empires and imperialism. Against the attempt either to conquer or to convert the world. In effect, what God was saying to Avraham Avinu: "Lech lecha, m'artzecha, umenoladecha, mibeit avicha..." is: 'Leave this place,' this great empire of Ur Kasdim, of Bavel, of Mesopotamia, 'Leave this empire and go off and create a new kind of society' ... and it should be a society in a land which, on the one hand will always find itself surrounded by empires who want to conquer it, because Israel is the great strategic location in the Middle East. It is the one place where three continents join: Europe, Africa, and Asia.

Every empire must want to conquer Israel, but Israel can never become an empire because it lacks the geography for empire.

You cannot ever find an empire in Israel. In fact, Jews are the only people who ever created a nation-state in Israel. Israel has been conquered by almost everyone who ever conquered anything. But no nation ever created a nation-state in Israel, only Jews. At all other periods, Eretz Yisrael was an outlying province of a major empire whose centre was elsewhere.

And what I suddenly realised is that Abraham and Sarah were being told: “Leave the home of empire and be different, in order to teach humanity the dignity of difference.” And that is what Judaism actually is.

R Sacks

Exile and Redemption

וְהִשְׁמַתִּי אֶנְי אֶת־הָאָרֶץ וְשָׂמְמוּ עָלֶיהָ אִיְבֵיכֶם הַיְשָׁבִים בָּהּ:
וְאַתְּכֶם אֲזַרְהָ בַגּוֹיִם וְהִרִיקֹתִי אֶחְרֵיכֶם חָרָב וְהִיְתָה אֶרְצְכֶם שְׂמָמָה וְעָרֵיכֶם יִהְיוּ
חָרְבָה:
אֹי תִרְצֶה הָאָרֶץ אֶת־שַׁבְּתוֹתֶיהָ כֹּל יְמֵי הַשְּׂמָמָה וְאַתֶּם בְּאֶרֶץ אִיְבֵיכֶם אֲזִ תִּשְׁבֹּת
הָאָרֶץ וְהִרְצַת אֶת־שַׁבְּתוֹתֶיהָ:
כֹּל־יְמֵי הַשְּׂמָמָה תִּשְׁבֹּת אֵת אֲשֶׁר לֹא־שַׁבְּתָה בְּשַׁבְּתוֹתֵיכֶם בְּשַׁבְּתוֹתֵיכֶם עָלֶיהָ:

I will scatter you among the nations and will unsheathe the sword to pursue you. Your land will be desolate and your cities in ruins. The land shall be appeased (*tirtzeh*) for its Sabbaths while it is desolate and you are in the land of your enemies; the land shall rest and have appeasement for its Sabbaths. All the days of its desolation it shall be at rest, according to the rest that it did not enjoy while you dwelt in it.

Vayikra 26

וְהִיָּה כִי־יָבֹאוּ עָלֶיךָ כָּל־הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה הַבְּרָכָה וְהַקְּלָלָה אֲשֶׁר נָתַתִּי לְפָנֶיךָ וְהִשְׁבַּחְתָּ אֱלֹהֶיךָ
בְּכָל־הַגּוֹיִם אֲשֶׁר הִדִּימְךָ יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ שְׂמָמָה:

וּשְׁבַתְּ עַד־יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ וְשָׁמַעְתָּ בְּקוֹלֹ כָּל אֲשֶׁר־אֲנֹכִי מְצַוֶּה הַיּוֹם אֶתְּךָ וּבְנֶיךָ בְּכָל־לְבָבְךָ
וּבְכָל־נַפְשְׁךָ:

וְשָׁב יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ אֶת־שְׁבוּתְךָ וְרַחֲמֶיךָ וְשָׁב וּקְבַצְךָ מִכָּל־הָעַמִּים אֲשֶׁר הִפִּיצְךָ יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ שָׁמָּה:
אִם־יְהִיֶּה גְדֻמָּתְךָ בְּקִצְהָ הַשָּׁמַיִם מִשָּׁם יִקְבַּצְךָ יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ וּמִשָּׁם יִקְנֶה:

When all these things befall you—the blessing and the curse that I have set before you—and you take them to heart amidst the various nations to which the LORD your God has banished you, 2 and you return to the LORD your God, and you and your children heed His command with all your heart and soul, just as I enjoin upon you this day, 3 then the LORD your God will restore your fortunes and take you back in love. He will bring you together again from all the peoples where the LORD your God has scattered you. 4 Even if your outcasts are at the ends of the world, from there the LORD your God will gather you, from there He will fetch you. 5 And the LORD your God will bring you to the land that your fathers possessed, and you shall possess it; and He will make you more prosperous and more numerous than your fathers.

Devarim 30

כֹּה אָמַר יְהוָה מִנְעֵי קוֹלְךָ מִבְּכִי וְעֵינַיִךָ מִדְּמְעָה כִּי יֵשׁ שָׂכָר לְפַעֲלֹתַי נְאֻם־יְהוָה וְשָׁבוּ
מֵאֶרֶץ אוֹיֵב:

Thus said GOD:

Restrain your voice from weeping,

Your eyes from shedding tears;

For there is a reward for your labor

—declares GOD:

They shall return from the enemy's land.

וַיֵּשׁ־תִקְנֶה לְאַחֲרֵיתָי נְאֻם־יְהוָה וְשָׁבוּ בָנִים לְגְבוּלָם:

And there is hope for your future

—declares GOD:

Your children shall return to their country.

Yirmiyahu 31

The Land That Waits For Us

[a] desolate country whose soil is rich enough, but is given over wholly to weeds—a silent mournful expanse....A desolation is here that not even imagination can grace with the pomp of life and action....We never saw a human being on the whole route....There was hardly a tree or a shrub anywhere. Even the olive and the cactus, those fast friends of the worthless soil, had almost deserted the country.”

Mark Twain “Innocents Abroad”

And Rabbi Abba says: You have no more explicit manifestation of the end of days than this following phenomenon, as it is stated: “But you, mountains of Israel, you shall give your branches, and yield your fruit to My people of Israel, for they will soon be coming” (Ezekiel 36:8). When produce will grow in abundance in Eretz Yisrael, it is an indication that the Messiah will be coming soon.

Sanhedrin 98a

Home-Coming

The Rabbi: This is a severe reproach, O king of the Khazars. It is the sin which kept the divine promise with regard to the second Temple, viz.: Sing and rejoice, O daughter of Zion! (Zachariah 2:10), from being fulfilled. Divine Providence was ready to restore everything as it had been at first, if they had all willingly consented to return. But only a part was ready to do so, whilst the majority and the aristocracy remained in Babylon, preferring dependence and slavery, and unwilling to leave their houses and their affairs.

Kuzari

Pragmatic

Anyone who thinks the Zionist idea is somehow associated with future redemption and the coming of the Messiah and who therefore regards it as undermining our holy faith is clearly in error. [Zionism] has nothing whatsoever to do with the question of redemption. The entire point of this idea is merely the improvement of the condition of our wretched brethren. In recent years our situation has deteriorated disastrously, and many of our brethren are scattered in every

direction, to the seven seas, in places where the fear of assimilation is hardly remote. [The Zionists] saw that the only fitting place for our brethren to settle would be in the Holy Land.

Rabbi Yaakov Reines

Messianic

Despite the grave faults of which we are aware in our life in general, and in Eretz Israel in particular, we must feel that we are being reborn and that we are being created once again as at the beginning of time. Our entire spiritual heritage is presently being absorbed within its source and is reappearing in a new guise, much reduced in material extent but qualitatively very rich and luxuriant and full of vital force. We are called to a new world suffused with the highest light, to an epoch the glory of which will surpass that of all the great ages which have preceded. All of our people believes that we are in the first stage of the Final Redemption. This deep faith is the very secret of its existence; it is the divine mystery implicit in its historical experience. This ancient tradition about the Redemption bears witness to the spiritual light by which the Jew understands himself and all the events of his history to the last generation, the one that is awaiting the Redemption that is near at hand.

Rav Avraham Yitzchak Kook

Forbidden

Three or four times he wrote to me about this and sent me his works and compositions, and pleaded with me to head his enterprise for the settlement of the Land of Israel, until he came to me with strong admonitions that I was preventing the redemption, etc. And I asked him to leave me alone on this matter. For what they thought to be a great mitzvah was in my eyes no small transgression, and it was therefore impossible to find common ground with him on this issue. I sent him my reasons and explanations, and then I found rest from him.”

R SR Hirsch

Waiting or Fighting

“When, during the reign of Hadrian, the uprising led by Bar Kochba proved a disastrous error, it became essential that the Jewish people be reminded for all times of another important fact; namely, that Israel must never again attempt to restore its national independence by its own power; it was to entrust its future as a nation solely to Divine Providence. Therefore when the nation, crushed by this new blow, had recovered its breath and hailed even the permission to give a decent burial to the hundreds of thousands who had fallen about Betar as the dawn of a better day, the sages who met at Yavneh added yet another blessing to the prayer for the restoration of Jerusalem. This fourth blessing is an acknowledgement that it has always been G-d and G-d alone Who has given us, and still gives us to this very day, that good in which we have had cause to rejoice; and that for future good, too, we may look to none other but G-d, and none besides Him. (Commentary to the Prayer Book, p. 703)

R SR Hirsch

וזאת היא דוגמת הגבורה המורה על שמירת ישיני עפר עד עת קץ שישובו לתחיה, כן תשוב כל הגדולה היותר נשגבה אל עמנו באחרית הימים. וזהו הטוב לעצמינו שלא הסריחו, כי לא תשיג יד הגלות וההריסה היותר נוראה לבטל צורתנו העצמית. ולא זו בלבד כי גם לא תגע ג"כ באושר הכללי השמור לעולם כולו מידינו להיות מטיבים לזולתינו. והמטיב שנתנו לקבורה, עד עת קץ שיעמדו לגורלם הנשגב.

Rav Kook Ein Ayeh

Land For Peace, Uganda!

No rabbinical authority disputes that our claim to a Divine mandate ... extends over the entire Holy Land within its historic borders and that halachically we have no right to surrender this claim. But what is questionable is whether we must, or indeed may, assert it at the risk of thousands of lives, if not the life of the State itself. Any religious law is set aside, even fasting on Yom Kippur, if it involves a danger to life. Rabbis, in giving such rulings in respect of individuals, are required to rely on expert medical opinion to determine what constitutes such danger in particular cases. Similarly, it would seem, we are halachically compelled to leave the judgement on what provides the optimum security for Jewish life in Israel to the verdict of military and political experts, not rabbis. Included as a major factor in this difficult judgement must also be the overriding concern to preserve the Jewish

character of Israel which may clearly depend on the proportion of Jews within the State. For in the suspension of religious laws for life-saving purposes, the threat to Jewish spiritual life and to physical life is considered alike. Most importantly also to be borne in mind must be some more intangible factors of Jewish religious and moral concern. The present ceding of some territory, if necessary and consistent with security requirements, may conceivably be justified as a ringing act of faith to promote regional, and indeed international peace, and as a goodwill gesture of immense value to establish friendly relations with the neighbouring peoples, ideals of human fellowship to which Judaism is passionately dedicated.

Lord Immanuel Jakobovits

The State of Israel is divine...Not only can/must there be no retreat from a single kilometer of the Land of Israel, God forbid, but on the contrary, we shall conquer and liberate more and more, as much in the spiritual as in the physical sense. "The Glory of Israel does not deceive or change His mind." [I Samuel 15:29.] We are stronger than America, stronger than Russia. With all the troubles and delays [we suffer], our position in the world, the world of history, the cosmic world, is stronger and more secure in its timelessness than theirs. There are nations that know this, and there are nations of uncircumcised heart that do not know it, but they shall gradually come to know it! Heaven protect us from weakness and timidity...In our divine, world-encompassing undertaking, there is no room for retreat.

Rav Tzvi Yehuda Kook

We agreed to the African proposal because we paid attention to the needs of the nation that is dearer to us than the Land [of Israel]—and the needs of the nation that is deteriorating both physically and spiritually requires a secure refuge wherever it may be.

R Reines

Messianic?

Indeed, in 1948 we did not speak of the Mashiach. We prayed for malkhut Yisrael, and sufficed with sovereignty comparable to that of the Second Temple period. There is no doubt that we attained at least that much. During Ezra's time, very few people came back to Israel; in our time – thank God, we have reached five, six million. We never had such numbers here!

The messianic feeling, the sense of the "revealed end," started after the Six-Day War. In realistic terms, it was difficult to understand how we had managed to defeat seven Arab armies with such ease...For a large sector of the public, the Six-Day War actually strengthened the view that the significance of the State of Israel is bound up with ruling over Eretz Yisrael, rather than with the actual fact of Jewish sovereignty, autonomy and freedom. These people regarded the war as a revealed miracle, and as proof of the imminent messianic redemption.

To my sorrow, I have not merited Divine inspiration. I have never met a prophet who fit all of the Rambam's identifying criteria, who told me that the Mashiach is already on the way...In any event, we must rejoice today just as we rejoiced in 1948. We must recognize that just as the Holocaust was a gargantuan chillul Hashem, so the State of Israel is the greatest kiddush Hashem. We have a problem with giving away parts of Eretz Yisrael, but let us look at what the Holy One has done for us! We have an independent State, we are a prosperous country, and we are militarily strong. True, there is poverty and there are plenty of other problems, but it is difficult to conceive of the magnitude of the change that has been wrought in our condition over the past sixty years.

Rav Amital

End

In the most haunting of all prophetic visions, the prophet Ezekiel saw a valley of dry bones, a heap of skeletons. God asked him, "Son of man, can these bones live?" Ezekiel replied, "God, you alone know."

Then the bones came together, and grew flesh and skin, and began to breathe, and live again. Then God said: "Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel. They say, "Our bones are dried up. Avdah tikvatenu, our hope is lost." Therefore prophesy and say to them: "This is what God says: My people, I am going to open your graves and bring you up from them; I will bring you back to the land of Israel."

It was this passage that Naftali Hertz Inbar was alluding to in 1877, when he wrote, in the song that became Israel's national anthem, Hatikva, the phrase "Od lo avdah tikvatenu, Our hope is not yet lost."

Little could he have known that seventy years later one third of the Jewish people would have become, in Auschwitz and Treblinka and Bergen-Belsen, a valley of

dry bones. Who could have been blamed for saying “Our bones are dried up, our hope is lost.”

And yet, a mere three years after standing eyeball to eyeball with the angel of death, the Jewish people, by proclaiming the State of Israel, made a momentous affirmation of life, as if it had heard across the centuries the echo of God’s words to Ezekiel: “Veheveti etchem el admat Yisrael, I will bring you back to the land of Israel.”

And a day will one day come, when the story of Israel in modern times will speak not just to Jews, but to all who believe in the power of the human spirit as it reaches out to God, as an everlasting symbol of the victory of life over death, hope over despair.

Israel has taken a barren land and made it bloom again. It’s taken an ancient language, the Hebrew of the Bible, and made it speak again. It’s taken the West’s oldest faith and made it young again. It’s taken a tattered, shattered nation and made it live again. Israel is the country whose national anthem, Hatikva, means “hope”. Israel is the home of hope.

R Sacks

וְהָיָה בְּאַחֲרֵי הַיָּמִים הַהֵלֶּה הָרַב בֵּית־יְהוָה נְכוּן בְּרֹאשׁ הַהָרִים וְנִשְׂאָה הוּא מִגְבְּעוֹת וְנִהְרָוּ עָלָיו עַמִּים:

In the days to come,
The Mount of GOD’s House shall stand
Firm above the mountains;
And it shall tower above the hills.
The peoples shall gaze on it with joy,

וְהָלְכוּ גוֹיִם רַבִּים וְאָמְרוּ לְכוּ וְנַעֲלֶה אֶל־הַר־יְהוָה וְאֶל־בַּיִת אֱלֹהֵי יַעֲקֹב וְיִרְגְּנוּ מִדְּרָכָיו וְנִלְכֶה בְּאַרְחֻתָיו כִּי מִצִּיּוֹן תֵּצֵא תוֹרָה וְדְבַר־יְהוָה מִירוּשָׁלַם:

And the many nations shall go and shall say:
“Come,
Let us go up to the Mount of GOD,
To the House of the God of Jacob;
That we may be instructed in God’s ways,
And that we may walk in godly paths.”
For instruction shall come forth from Zion,
The word of GOD from Jerusalem.

וְשָׁפֵט בֵּין עַמִּים רַבִּים וְהוֹכִיחַ לְגוֹיִם עֲצָמִים עַד־רָחוֹק וְכִתְּלוּ חֲרַבְתֵּיהֶם לְאֵתִים וְחַנִּיתֵיהֶם לְמִזְמֹרוֹת לֹא־יִשְׂאוּ גוֹי אֶל־גוֹי חֶרֶב וְלֹא־יִלְמְדוּ עוֹד מִלְחָמָה:

Thus [God] will judge among the many peoples,
And arbitrate for the multitude of nations,

However distant;
And they shall beat their swords into plowshares
And their spears into pruning hooks.
Nation shall not take up
Sword against nation;
They shall never again know war;

Amos 4