

## The Declaration of the Establishment of the State of Israel (First Paragraph)

### **Translation: Official Translation, 14.5.1948**

The Land of Israel was the birthplace of the Jewish people. Here their spiritual, religious and political identity was shaped. Here they first attained to statehood, created cultural values of national and universal significance and gave to the world the eternal Book of Books.

### **Version 1: Mordechai Bahm. 4.27.48**

Because the God of Israel gave this land to our ancestors, Abraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov, and their descendants, to be their eternal possession, and because our people maintained their statehood in this land from the time of Joshua until the destruction of the Second Temple by the Romans, and the exile of most of our people from its land...

### **Version 2: Tzvi Berenzon 5.9.48**

On the grounds of the inseparable traditional and historical link between the people of Israel and the land of Israel...

### **Version 3: Moshe Sharett 5.13.48**

Because the Jewish people were exiled by force from its land, the land of Israel, they maintained loyalty in every generation, and in all the lands of the Diaspora, and did not find, during all of its wandering, another land to replace it.

### **David Ben-Gurion**

#### **From Studies in the Tanach)**

My first premise is that the People of Israel, or the Hebrew Nation, was born in the land and developed in the land, even before the days of Abraham, as one amongst the peoples of Canaan. Their language was Hebrew, as was the language of the other people's of Canaan, Moav, and Amon, indeed only one thing distinguished them from their neighbors from the outset: They believed in one God...The land of Canaan at that time was materially and spiritually destitute, however the reality of the nation of Israel within it with its unique belief system – belief in the One God – kept the land together. There were also other peoples, whose language was also Hebrew, but their faith was different: they had other gods, many in number. The lands with a developed culture at that time were Egypt and Babylon. One of the gentry of Babylon, Avram the son of Terach, figured out for himself the belief in the One Almighty God to the disparagement of the popular belief in his land, and thus was drawn to the land of Canaan where dwelled a people large or small that held this belief.

**From Reuben Alkalay's The Complete Hebrew English Dictionary:** קם [Kam]: to stand, stand (rise, get) up, arise, to rise against, set upon; to happen, occur, take place, come to pass, be established.

### **Translation: Independence Hall in Tel Aviv**

In the land of Israel the Jewish people came into being. In this Land was shaped their spiritual, religious, and national character. Here they lived in sovereign independence. Here they created a culture of national and universal import, and gave to the world the eternal Book of Books.

**Genesis 12:1-7** *The LORD said to Abram, "Go forth from your native land and from your father's house to the land that I will show you. I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you shall be a blessing... Abram went forth as the LORD had com-manded him, and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he left Haran. Abram took his wife Sarai and his brother's son Lot, and all the wealth that they had amassed, and the persons that they had acquired in Haran; and they set out for the land of Canaan. When they arrived in the land of Canaan, Abram passed through the land as far as the site of Shechem, at the terebinth of Moreh. The Canaanites were then in the land. The LORD appeared to Abram and said, "I will assign this land to your offspring."*

בארץ ישראל קם העם היהודי,  
בה עוצבה דמותו הרוחנית  
הדתית והמדינית בה חי חיי  
קוממיות ממלכתית, בה יצר  
נכסי תרבות לאומיים וכלל  
אנושיים והוריש לעולם כולו  
את ספר הספרים הנצחי.

### **Genesis 26:3**

*Reside in this land and I will be with you and bless you; I will assign all these lands to you and to your offspring, fulfilling the oath that I swore to your father Abraham.*

**Genesis 28: 12-14** *He had a dream; a stairway was set on the ground and its top reached to the sky, and angels of God were going up and down on it. And the Lord*

*was standing beside him and said: "I am the Lord, the God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac: the ground on which you are lying I will assign to you and to your offspring. Your descendants shall be as the dust of the earth; you shall spread out to the west and to the east, to the north and to the south. All families of the earth shall bless themselves by you and your descendants. (Biblical Quotations from: Jewish Publication Society Hebrew-English Tanakh, 2nd Edition, 1999)*

**Deuteronomy 27: 1-9** *Moses and the elders of Israel charged the people saying: Observe all the Instruction that I enjoin upon you this day. As soon as you have crossed the Jordan into the land that the Lord your God is giving you, you shall set [וַהֲקִמְתֶּם] large stones...Moses and the Levitical priests spoke to all Israel, saying: Silence! Hear, O Israel! Today you have become the people of the Lord your God: Heed the Lord your God and observe His commandments and His laws which I enjoin upon you this day.*

## Here

Here's my home, here I was born  
In the plain, which is on the shore  
Here, the friends with whom I was raised  
And I have no other place in the world  
I have no other place in the world

Here's my home, here I played  
On the lowland, which is on the  
mountain

Here I drank water from the well  
And planted grass in the desert  
And planted grass in the desert

Here I was born, here my children were  
born to me  
Here I built my home with my own two  
hands  
Here you are also with me and here are  
all thousands of my friends  
And after 2000 years - an end to my  
wandering

Here I played all my songs  
And marched in a nocturnal-trek  
Here I protected in my youth time  
My God's piece of land  
My God's piece of land

Here, I was born, here my children were  
born to me...

Here, Here I set my table  
A slice of bread, a fresh flower  
I opened a door to the neighbors  
And whoever comes we'll tell him:  
"welcome"  
And whoever comes we'll tell him:  
"welcome"

Here I was born, here my children were  
born

## Song by Uzi Chitman, 1991

**Hannah Senesh: Excerpt from a letter to a friend in the forced labor battalion in Hungary**  
Nahalal, December 6<sup>th</sup> 1940 -

...I did not come here for reasons of tourism, nor for purposes of exploration, nor for reasons of economy...I, like every other Zionist, am searching for a home, a country, and I will try to explain what it is in Eretz Israel that offers this – or can offer it. For those Jews born who were from here (the 'Sabras'), this is not a question, just as it is not for any people living in its own land. For the Sabras this land is their natural heritage: it is their country, the language is their language. So for them there is no question of 'searching for a home'. And their daily lives express this truth better than any words can.

For those who, from free choice or conviction, or by reason of necessity (one can't draw a sharp line between them), came to the Land, it is more difficult to answer the question. We have two basic characteristics: we want to get something from the Land, which is natural. But we must give, too, which is our duty. If we can accept from it what it can give us, and can give it what it needs from us, then Eretz Israel can become our home.

*From Hannah Senesh: Her Life and Diary (Introduction by Abba Eban). Translated by Marta Cohn. New York: Schocken Books, 1972, p. 157-158.*

Theodore Herzl's 1902 novel, Altneuland, ("Old-New Land") presented a utopian vision of the reestablished Jewish State. Would you write the book's title: ארץ על-תנאי – "A Land on Condition", or ארץ אל-תנאי – "An Unconditional Land"?

## Mechilta of R. Shimon bar Yochai, Parashat Yitro

"...they entered the wilderness of Sinai and encamped in the wilderness. Israel encamped there in front of the mountain. (Exodus 19:2)"

This shows us that the Torah was given to Israel in an ownerless place (wilderness). For, if it was given in the land of Israel, they would have said, "It is ours." If it were given in another place, the people of that place would have said, "It is ours." It was given in an ownerless place so that all who wanted to receive it could come and take of it.

בארץ ישראל קם העם  
היהודי, בה עוצבה  
דמותו הרוחנית הדתית  
והמדינית בה חי חיי  
קוממיות ממלכתית, בה  
יצר נכסי תרבות  
לאומיים וכלל אנושיים  
והוריש לעולם כולו את  
ספר הספרים הנצחי.

Midrash Raba Numbers 23:7

The Holy One Blessed be He said to Moses: This is the Land that I adore, as it is said, "A land which Adonai your God looks after continually (Deut 11:12), and I adore Israel, as it is said, "For, it was because Adonai loved you... (Deut. 7:8). Said the Holy One: I will bring in Israel - whom I adore - to the land that I adore, as it said: "For, it is because you enter the land of Canaan...(Num. 34:2)"

**"Three Things Were Given-on-Condition: The Land of Israel, the Temple, and the Davidic dynasty. Torah and the covenant of Aaron were given without condition." (Mechilta Yitro 2)**

"Our hold on the Land of Israel is not absolute possession, for the Land of Israel is not ascribed to the Nation of Israel in the way that other lands are ascribed to the rest of the nations. Rather, our possession of the Land of Israel is conditioned on our behavior in it. True, Israel is our inheritance, but our right to exercise our ownership depends entirely on our performance of Torah-commanded deeds here. Holding the land for itself by conquering strength does not guarantee we will remain here...We say in the Shema twice each day: "והיה אם שמע – If, then you obey the commandments..." then "you and your children may endure in the Land..."; But if - God forbid! - "your heart be deceived and you turn aside..." then "ye perish quickly from off the good land. (Rabbi Eliezer Menachem Shach, *Davar Torah* 1993)

## SY Agnon –Nobel Prize Acceptance speech:

As a result of the historic catastrophe in which Titus of Rome destroyed Jerusalem and Israel was exiled from its land, I was born in one of the cities of the Exile. But always I regarded myself as one who was born in Jerusalem. In a dream, in a vision of the night, I saw myself standing with my brother-Levites in the Holy Temple, singing with them the songs of David, King of Israel.

### Questions for Study and Discussion:

#### *Sources 1-3: Different versions of the opening of the Declaration*

1. Compare the four versions of the opening of the document
  - a. From which point in Jewish history does each version begin?
  - b. How does each version suggest a different relationship between the land of Israel and the Jewish people?
  - c. What can we learn from each version and from the final choice that the authors made?
2. The word **אֶרֶץ** can mean different things. Depending on how one understands the word, different commentaries arise regarding the phrase, “In the land of Israel, the Jewish nation **אֶרֶץ**.” Try switching the word with other verbs: “appeared,” “arose,” “developed,” “formed.” How do these change the meaning of the phrase? What do you think the authors intended the word to mean?
3. Also compare the two translations: “Eretz Yisrael was the birthplace of the Jewish people.” “In the land of Israel the Jewish people came into being.” What do these two versions suggest?
4. What are the five main points in the Declaration’s first paragraph?
5. What is your opinion about each point?

#### *Other Sources*

1. Compare the position of the Declaration with the position of the biblical passage on the question of how the Jewish nation/people arose (**אֶרֶץ**).
2. How did Ben Gurion harmonize the two positions? What is your opinion about his claims? What goal was he trying to accomplish?
3. Regarding the question of where the cultural heritage of the Jews was formed, what are the differences between the position of the Declaration of Independence and the position of the midrash from the Mekilta (page 2)?
4. Rabbi Shach posits conditions for Israel’s dwelling in the Land of Israel as primarily theological and *halachic*. Are there other conditions (such as environmental, ethical, or other obligations) that you see as an essential part of that “conditioning” today? Does the full text of the Declaration itself suggest other “conditions” that today’s State of Israel pledges itself to live up to? Do you see Israel as succeeding in meeting these conditions?
5. How do Shai Agnon and Hannah Senesh, who were not born in the Land of Israel, explain their relationships to the Land?
6. According to the song “Here,” how is a person who is born in the Land of Israel connected to the Land?
7. How does whether a person was born or not born in the Land of Israel influence his/her relationship to the Land?
8. Look at the biographies of the writers of the sources. How does their personal histories (for example, where they were born, where they chose to live, how well they know the Land of Israel) influence their positions?
9. Which, if any, of the sources we have read reflect your beliefs and feelings about the Land of Israel, and how?
10. Do you think there can be a Jewish point of view in which the Land of Israel is not a central element? In other words, can there be Jewish life/ existence without Eretz Yisrael?
11. After studying the rejected versions of the Declaration, what do you think the author(s) of the final version wanted to say about the Jewish people’s past and future?
12. How would you word the opening of the Declaration of Independence?

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