

Israel Worksheet 1A – Home/Homeland: Jewish Texts

Text 1: Excerpt from poem "To My Country" by Rachel Bluwstein (1890-1931)

I haven't sung to you, my country.
I have not glorified your name
with great heroic deeds,
or loot from the battlefield.

My hands have simply planted a tree
on Jordan's calms shores.
My feet have simply formed a path
through the fields.

לא שָׂרַתִּי לָךְ, אֶרְצִי,
וְלֹא פָאֲרַתִּי שְׁמֶךָ
בְּעֲלִילוֹת גְּבוּרָה,
בְּשָׁלֵל קִרְבוֹת;
רַק עֵץ – יָדַי נָטְעוּ
חֹפֵי יַרְדֵּן שׁוֹקֵטִים.
רַק שְׁבִיל – כְּבָשׁוּ רַגְלִי
עַל פְּנֵי שְׂדוֹת.

1. How would you paraphrase the first stanza?

2. How would you paraphrase the second stanza?

3. The first stanza describes what the poet "has not" done, and the second describes what she "has done." How do the two compare? How does she feel about what she hasn't done? How does she feel about what she has done?

4. Why do you think the poet uses the word "simply" twice in the second stanza?

5. How do you think the poet would describe her relationship with Israel?

6. What do you think this poet would say about the idea of Israel as a homeland? Explain.

Text 2: "To Caesarea" by Hannah Senesh (1921-1944)

Hush, cease all sound.
Across the sea is the sand,
The shore known and near,
The shore golden, dear,
Home, the Homeland.
With step twisting and light
Among strangers we move,
Word and song hushed,
Toward the future-past Caesarea...
But reaching the city of ruins
Soft a few words we intone.
We return.
We are here.
Soft answers the silence of stone,
We awaited you two thousand years.

1. What is the poet describing in this poem? Where is she, and who is with her?
2. Where does the poet emphasize silence or quiet, and why? How does the sense of silence lend to the tone (emotion) of the poem?
3. What does she mean by "the future-past Caesarea"? How does this phrase relate to the last four lines?
4. How do you think the poet would describe her relationship with Israel?
5. What do you think this poet would say about the idea of Israel as a homeland? Explain.

Text 3: "Pine" by Lea Goldberg (1911-1970)

Here I will not hear the voice of the cuckoo.
Here the tree will never wear a cape of snow.
But it is here in the shade of these pines
my entire childhood comes alive.

כאן לא אשמע את קול הקוקייה,
כאן לא יחבוש העץ מצנפת שלג,
אבל בצל האורנים האלה
כל ילדותי שקמה לתחיה.

The chime of the needles: Once upon a time –
I called the snow-space homeland,
and the green ice that enchains the stream
the poem's tongue in a foreign land.

צלצול המחטים: היה היה
אקרא מולדת למרחב השלג
לקרח ירקרק כובל הפלג,
ללשון השיר בארץ נכריה.

Perhaps only migrating birds know -
suspended as they are between earth and sky -
this heartache of two homelands.

אולי רק ציפורי מסע יודעות
כשהן תלויות בין ארץ ושמים
את זה הכאב של שתי המולדות.

With you I was transplanted twice,
with you, pine trees, I grew,
my roots in two separate lands.*

איתכם אני נשתלתי פעמים,
איתכם אני צמחתי, ארנים,
ושורשי בשני נופים שונים.**

* Translated by Rachel Tzvia Back. From *Lea Goldberg: Selected Poetry and Drama*. Poetry translated and introduced by Rachel Tzvia Back; Drama translated by T. Carmi. New Milford CT: *The Toby Press*, 2005. 91.

** © 1970, Lea Goldberg

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1. How would you paraphrase the first two stanzas? How do the pine trees remind the poet of her homeland?

2. Why is the poet's experience as a person with two homelands like that of "migrating birds"? What do you think of this metaphor?

3. In what ways is the poet like the pine trees she describes?

4. How do you think the poet would describe her relationship with Israel?

5. What do you think this poet would say about the idea of Israel as a homeland? Explain.

Text 4: Deuteronomy (Devarim) 8:7-9

כִּי ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ, מְבִיאֲךָ אֶל-אֶרֶץ טוֹבָה: אֶרֶץ, נַחְלֵי מַיִם--עֵינֹת וְתַהֲמוֹת, יֵצְאִים בְּבִקְעָה וּבְהָר. אֶרֶץ חֹטֶה וּשְׁעָרָה, וְגִפְן וְתַאֲנָה וְרִמּוֹן; אֶרֶץ-זֵית שֶׁמֶן, וְדָבָשׁ. אֶרֶץ, אֲשֶׁר לֹא בְמִסְכָּנֹת תֹּאכַל-בָּהּ לֶחֶם--לֹא-תִחָסֵר כֹּל, בָּהּ; אֶרֶץ אֲשֶׁר אַבְנֶיהָ בְרִזָּל, וּמִהַרְרֵיהָ תִחְצַב נְחֹשֶׁת.

“For the Lord your God is bringing you into a good land, a land with streams and springs and fountains issuing from plain and hill; a land of wheat and barley, of vines, figs, and pomegranates, a land of olive trees and honey; a land where you may eat food without stint, where you will lack nothing; a land whose rocks are iron and from whose hills you can mine copper.”

1. What images does this piece of text use to describe Israel?
2. This text describes three categories of things that are plentiful in Israel. What are those three categories, what items are specified within them, and why are they important?
3. How does this text make you feel about Israel? Why?
4. How do you think this text relates to the idea of Israel as a homeland? Explain.