

**From the Balcony: The Art of Zionist Thought & Israeli Identity**  
**Session III: On the Complexity of Return and Renewal**



**Reuven Ruben, *Self-Portraits***  
**(Left, Romania, 1921; Right, Tel Aviv, 1923)**

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Reuven Ruben, *First Fruits*, 1923

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## **1. Yakov Cahan (Russia/Israel, 1881-1960), *Ha-Ivri He-Hadash, 'The New Hebrew,' 1911***

He is approaching; he must come – the new Hebrew . . . How beautiful will be the new Hebrew as he walks upright on the land of his ancestors . . . Proudly and strongly will he stride, like the ancient Hebrew; mighty with lofty brow and thick mane; the glory of the victory of man.

## **2. A.D. Gordon (Russia, 1856-1922), 'People and Labor,' 1911**

The Jewish people has been completely cut off from nature and imprisoned within city walls these two thousand years. We have become accustomed to every form of life, except to a life of labor . . . It will require the greatest effort of will for such people to become normal again. We lack the principal ingredient for national life. We lack the habit of labor—not labor performed out of external compulsion, but labor to which one is attached in a natural and organic way. This kind of labor binds a people to its soil and to its national culture, which is an outgrowth of the people's soil and the people's labor.

## **3. Rachel Bluwstein (Russia/Israel, 1890-1931), *Oh, My Land!*, 1929**

O my land, my parent, Why is your landscape so blighted and gloomy?  
The memory of a step-motherland, Imperceptibly creeps into the heart.  
Upon the hillside – the sprightly fir tree, On the plain – the ancient oak,  
On the slopes, on the shores of the stream, The birch maidens in their Shabbat garb;  
The arm of the sun is too short to cast its fiery lance into the heart of the forest,  
A whole day in the abode of the pines, scented darkness and a dream.  
O my mother! Surely we yearn for you, Surely we will claim your abuse from God –  
And as in former times, you will again, spread fragrance and shade  
Over those stricken by your noontime heat.

## **4. Martin Buber (Austria/Germany/Israel, 1878-1965), *Open Letter to Gandhi*, 1939**

. . . I believe in the great marriage between (*adam*) and earth (*adamah*). This land recognizes us, for it is fruitful through us: and precisely because it bears fruit for us, it recognizes us. . . The more fertile this land become, the more space there will be for us [Jews] and for them [Arabs]. We have no desire to dispossess them: we want to live with them. We do not want to dominate them: we want to serve with them . . .

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## **Reflective Question**

The excerpts above each year for a Jewish rootedness in land. How might you relate to that notion, and is there an excerpt that resonates most (or least?) deeply for you? How so?

## **Zionist Challenge**

Is there a way to balance the confidence and agency of the “New Jew” of Israel, with a stance of humility?