

Dear Educator,

Thank you for your interest in teaching about the Green Line, how it relates to Jewish values, and why it's so important for Israel's future!

What follows is a text study that we hope will be useful as you think about the maps of Israel being used at your school, synagogue, or other institution. You can use this text study to help your students or congregants engage in a conversation about the meaning and purpose of including the Green Line on maps of Israel.

The texts span the range of Jewish thought, from the Torah to modern Hebrew literature. The study session can be done in chevruta (pair learning) or shiur (seminar-style learning).

We separated these texts into three sections, each with a different overall question that sets out a general theme for that section. After each individual text, there are one or two questions to help you check for understanding with your students. At the end of each section, you can draw on that section's guiding questions to frame a discussion.

If you are short on time, we recommend choosing either Section I or II and then doing Section III.

At the end of the session, if appropriate, you may choose to show our Green Line video, which can be found at jstreet.org/greenline.

If you would like to request more maps of Israel and the Palestinian Territory or learn more about the Green Line, please visit jstreet.org/greenline or email maps@jstreet.org.

Sincerely,

The J Street Education Team

In this text study, drawing on sources from the Torah to commentaries to modern literature and opinion, we'll explore the meaning and significance of the Green Line. The Green Line is the pre-1967 border of Israel, and today it delineates Israel proper from the West Bank and Gaza.

Section I: What obligations do we have when dwelling on the land?

This section deals with the obligations of justice that come along with control over the Holy Land. The first text explicitly ties our possession of the land to our pursuit of justice. The next text and accompanying commentary warn against the injustice of moving "your neighbor's landmark." Think about the connection between the Green Line and the idea of a landmark differentiating the property line between two neighbors.

TEXT A: Justice, justice shall you pursue, that you may live and possess the land the Lord, your God, is giving you. – *Deut. 16:20*

Consider: What is the relationship between justice and proprietorship of land?

TEXT B: You shall not pull back your neighbor's landmark, which the earlier ones have set as borders in your inheritance, which you will inherit in the land that the Lord, your God gives you, to possess. – *Deut. 19:14*

Ramban Commentary (1194–c. 1270):

You shall not pull back [your neighbor's] landmark: This is a warning against changing the boundaries of the division by which the princes apportioned the land to the tribes or to any individual among them. Therefore he stated, which they of old time have set, these being Eleazar the priest, and Joshua son of Nun, and the princes of the tribes, and therefore he mentioned in Your inheritance which thou shall inherit etc. And the reason for this commandment is that no one should contemplate to say "My portion which they gave me is not as valuable as the portion of my friend, because the dividers erred," or he may feel suspicious of the lots, thus he will not consider it [his removal of the boundary marker] to be robbery at all. Therefore he commanded here that no one should controvert that division, and he may not make any change in the boundaries, either secretly or openly. Now this is an explanatory mitzvah, deriving from what God commanded (Numbers 26:56) 'According to the lot shall their inheritance be divided between the more and the fewer.' And He (God) further stated, these are the men that shall take possession of the Land for you.

Consider: What emotion does Ramban identify as necessitating this commandment (given the fact that there is already a commandment against robbery)?

Guiding Questions for Section I:

1. Is "pulling back your neighbor's landmark" (i.e. changing the boundaries) conducive to the pursuit of justice? Why or why not?

2. What constitutes “pulling back your neighbor’s landmark”? Does the action need to be physical? What role do maps play in establishing “landmarks”? Does changing the border on a map count as changing a landmark?
3. What obligations do these texts set out for us when it comes to borders?

Section II: Can you split something that is holy?

This section discusses the importance of having clear and recognized borders and the effect that the borders we set can have on political reality. In the first text, God shows Moses the land which the Israelites are to one day inherit. This text can start a conversation about the importance of borders, and Texts 2 and 3 present positions on the relationship between what we claim is ours and the reality of what we end up with. Text 3 implores us to think carefully about our actions, because they will define the holiness of the land.

TEXT A: And Moses went up from the plains of Moab unto mount Nebo, to the top of Pisgah, that is over against Jericho. And the Lord showed him all the land, even Gilead as far as Dan; and all Naphtali, and the land of Ephraim and Manasseh, and all the land of Judah as far as the hinder sea; and the South, and the Plain, even the valley of Jericho the city of palm trees, as far as Zoar. And the Lord said unto him: ‘This is the land which I swore unto Abraham, unto Isaac, and unto Jacob, saying: I will give it unto thy seed. – *Deut. 34:14*

Consider: Why is it important for Moshe to be able to identify his land?

TEXT B: Two [people] are holding onto a garment (Talit). One says, “I found it!” and the other says, “I found it!” One says, “It’s all mine!” and the other says, “It’s all mine!” One swears that he doesn’t own less than half and the other swears he doesn’t own less than half and they split it. One says, “All of it is mine!” and the other says “Half of it is mine!” The one who says all of it is his swears he doesn’t own less than three quarters and the one who says half swears he doesn’t own less than a quarter and this one gets three quarters and that one gets one quarter. – *Mishna Bava Metzia 1:12*

Consider: What is the consequence of one person insisting that he or she owns more than half of the garment?

TEXT C: Sanctifying the Sabbath is part of our imitation of God, but it also becomes a way to find God’s presence. It is not in space but in time, he writes, that we find God’s likeness. In the Bible, no thing or place is holy by itself; not even the Promised Land is called holy. While the holiness of the land and of festivals

depends on the actions of the Jewish people, who have to sanctify them, the holiness of the Sabbath, he writes, preceded the holiness of Israel. Even if people fail to observe the Sabbath, it remains holy. – *Abraham Joshua Heschel, The Sabbath*

Consider: According to Heschel, what makes the land of Israel holy?

TEXT D: The instruction that the education minister recently issued – to imprint the Green Line on all maps of Israel – has consequences that stray greatly from the political arguments and political stances. I am compelled to agree with the Sokolov prize winner Uzi Benziman, who wrote this week in Haaretz, that the Green Line is not only a temporary marker whose time has passed, rather a real border, and all of the mentality of this State sees it that way.

At the moment, I ask to pay attention to one specific aspect, which is critical, of the minister's instruction. One could simply call this "Shlomo's trial." One can summarize in one sentence, as fitting as an acrimonious mythological verdict: Whoever is willing to split the baby in half, means that the baby is not theirs.

The Palestinians, as the nations will reconcile at the end of the day, will say that they never marked a division line on their maps. In their curricula and in their schools the land is one entity, undisturbed, unable to be severed or split. There are no halves, just a whole.

Not only do they love this land more, it will be stated at the end of days, which all of the testimony, that not only are they more connected to it, rather they are not willing to part with any part of it – under any circumstances – which will have consequences for determining ownership.

– *Eyal Megged, "Thinking About the Solomonian Trial" Makor Rishon newspaper Dec. 15, 2006*

Consider: How does Megged claim recognition of the Green Line affects political reality?

Guiding Questions for Section II:

1. Why is it important for a nation to have clearly defined borders?
2. How does the story of the talit relate to the Green Line? Is it fair for one of the people to insist on owning more than half of the talit even after they split it?
3. If the "holiness of the land depends on the actions of the Jewish people," then what responsibilities do we have? How do the responsibilities of our actions relate to the relationship between claimed land and political reality identified by Megged?

Section III: What is a just way to have a homeland in a place where other people live?

The text in this section gets at the essence of Zionism and our relationship with Israel. Try to unpack what Amos Oz sees as the difference between Zionism as an emotional motivation and justifying Zionism to others, specifically Palestinians. Think about how this text connects to the earlier sections.

TEXT A: The land of the Jews, I said. The land of the Jews could not have come into being and could not have existed anywhere but here. Not in Uganda, not in Ararat and not in Birobidjan. Because this is the place the Jews have always looked to throughout their history. Because there is no other territory to which the Jews would have come in their masses to establish a Jewish homeland. On this point I commit myself to a severe, remorseless distinction between the inner motives of the return to Zion and its justification to others. The age-old longings are a motive, but not a justification. Political Zionism has made political, national use of religious, messianic yearnings. And rightly so. But our justification vis-à-vis the Arab inhabitants of the country cannot be based on our age-old longings. What are our longings to them? The Zionist enterprise has no other objective justification than the right of a drowning man to grasp the only plank that can save him. And that is justification enough. (Here I must anticipate something I shall return to later: there is a vast moral difference between the drowning man who grasps a plank and makes room for himself by pushing the others who are sitting on it to one side, even by force, and the drowning man who grabs the whole plank for himself and pushes the others into the sea. This is the moral argument that lies behind our repeated agreement in principle to the partition of the Land. This is the difference between making Jaffa and Nazareth Jewish, and making Ramallah and Nablus Jewish.)

In a nutshell, I am a Zionist in all that concerns the redemption of the Jews, but not when it comes to the 'redemption of the Holy Land.' We have come here to live as a free nation, not 'to liberate the land that groans under the desecration of a foreign yoke,' Samaria, Gilead, Aram and Haran up to the great Euphrates River. The word 'liberation' applies to people, not to dust and stone. I was not born to blow rams' horns or 'purge a heritage that has been defiled by strangers.'

– Amos Oz, *Under This Blazing Light*, p. 82-83, 1979

Consider:

1. How does the distinction between a Zionism driven by emotional urges and a Zionism based on legitimate justification lead to the divergent actions taken by the drowning man?
2. How does Oz apply this distinction to our relationship with the land?

Guiding Questions for Section III:

1. How does the relationship between justice and land ownership established in Deuteronomy 16:20 relate to Amos Oz's distinction between a Zionism based on emotional urges and legitimate justification?
2. Would "pulling back your neighbor's landmark" (i.e. unilaterally changing the boundaries) be motivationbased or justificationbased? What about changing a line on a map?
3. How does the action of erasing the Green Line reflect on our relationship with the Palestinians? How does this action relate to the holiness of the land?

Closing Discussion

1. How do maps help frame our consciousness and our understanding of Israel, the region, and the conflict?
2. What hopes do you have for Israel's future? How do they inform your view of what our maps should look like?
3. Coming out of this session, what do you want to learn more about or do moving forward?

Learn more at jstreet.org/greenline

- Watch a video
- Learn about the history and significance of the Green Line
- Request a map of Israel and the Palestinian Territory
- Find out how you can take action