

SOIL

Good morning. In the old horror films, every time Count Dracula travelled abroad he would take a coffin filled with earth to sleep in by day. The soil had to be from his own native Transylvania. Any other dirt wouldn't have the magic to keep him alive till sundown.

The ancient Israelites had a story in their tradition of a famous Syrian General coming into their country and being healed of leprosy by the prophet Elisha. He is understandably elated and well impressed by the power of Israel's God and so he takes home with him a good few sackfuls of their earth. He hopes to be able to pray to that God and he reckons that he'll only be heard if he stands on Israeli soil. After all, in his mind this God is only the God of Israel.

It strikes us as pretty primitive - the notion that if you stand on the soil of a particular country there is some magic there, or that only then can you get a hearing from God, and yet this same land of Israel and the Middle East is still being fought over by those who claim it belongs to them, and in some cases that God has promised them the land.

All of us have a natural instinct to have warm feelings towards the place we were born, and we tend to have a pride in our country of origin. There is nothing wrong with that as long as we remember that there is no magic earth and that one country and one set of people aren't worth more than any other. The idea that we are brothers and sisters together in this planet - all part of one worldwide family - is hardly new - and yet the more we truly believe that, and live it, the less we will see misunderstandings discrimination and war.

Too many wars have been fought in the name of an unquestioning patriotism. Too many wars are fought as the result of one country's desire to dominate and exploit another.

We live on this planet and we walk on the soil of this world together. There is no magic soil. We may feel a natural sense of pride in belonging to our particular part of the planet. But we can do that without feeling that our neighbours are worth less than ourselves.

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