

# HOW DO WE TALK ABOUT ISRAEL?

**A GUIDED CONVERSATION**



# WELCOME

Before we begin, let's review the brit—the covenant—that animates our time together:

1. **Accountability:** I'll show up to our agreed-upon meetings. I'll let the host know the (good) reason I will be absent. I will also be punctual and respect everyone's time.
2. **Presence:** When we're together, I'll be present and mindful. I will listen and share. Life (and our mobile devices) offer many distractions, but I will stay present and engaged.
3. **Double Confidentiality:** What I hear and say stays here. If I see another group member in a different context, I will not bring up anything they said here unless they do first.
4. **Vulnerability:** I'll stretch myself to be as open and honest as possible with my perspectives and experiences in order to create a safe environment that might encourage others to take risks as well.
5. **Respect:** I will remember that all of us are here for a common purpose and I will respect and acknowledge everyone in my group.
6. **No Fixing, Advising, Saving or Setting Straight:** I will give each person the gift of true attention without trying to "solve their problem." No advice unless it's asked.
7. **Stepping Up & Stepping Back:** I understand that some of us are natural talkers while others are quieter. I'll pay attention to how much I am contributing, and will seek to balance how much I am talking with how much I'm listening.
8. **Curiosity:** Judaism is a religion of exploration; of big questions more than answers. I will get the most out of my group by being open to our discussions and the people around me.
9. **Ownership:** This is our community to create. While we have guidelines and suggestions, it is ours to shape and form. We will get out of it what we put into it.

# ASK & SHARE

What is an image or story that comes to mind when you hear the word “Israel”? Take a minute to jot down some notes. When we are all ready, we will each be invited (but not required) to briefly share our associations.

You can use the space below to make some notes to yourself.

# LEARN

Following is a poem by the great modern Israeli poet, Yehuda Amichai. Take a minute to read it out loud as a group.

Tourists  
Yehuda Amichai

Visits of condolence is all we get from them.  
They squat at the Holocaust Memorial,  
They put on grave faces at the Wailing Wall  
And they laugh behind heavy curtains  
In their hotels.  
They have their pictures taken  
Together with our famous dead  
At Rachel's Tomb and Herzl's Tomb  
And on Ammunition Hill.  
They weep over our sweet boys  
And lust after our tough girls  
And hang up their underwear  
To dry quickly  
In cool, blue bathrooms.

Once I sat on the steps by a gate at David's Tower,  
I placed my two heavy baskets at my side.  
A group of tourists was standing around their guide  
and I became their target marker.  
"You see that man with the baskets?  
Just right of his head there's an arch  
from the Roman period. Just right of his head."  
"But he's moving, he's moving!"  
I said to myself: redemption will come  
only if their guide tells them,  
"You see that arch from the Roman period?  
It's not important: but next to it,  
left and down a bit, there sits a man  
who's bought fruit and vegetables for his family."

As we reflect on this text, here are a few questions to consider:

### **Interpretive Questions**

- Who are the tourists in this poem? What is their relationship to Israel?
- Why is the Roman arch significant to these tourists?
- What does the narrator mean when he refers to “redemption” near the end of the poem?
- What is the narrator’s implied critique of the tourists? What would the narrator have them do differently?

### **Reflective Questions**

- Who in this poem do you most identify with, and why?
- What would “redemption” look like to you, when it comes to Israel?
- If you were to heed this poem’s call to action, what would that look like?

You can use the space below to write some notes to yourself.

# PERSPECTIVES FROM JEWISH TRADITION

Rabbi Melissa Weintraub is a founder of Resetting the Table, an organization that specializes in fostering productive conversations about Israel. She writes:

This is a time when many of us, on every side of the political spectrum, are scared. Scared for Israel's security and future. Scared that Israel is in danger. Scared that there is so much at stake: not only our peoples' safety, but also our very identities and most strongly-held values and commitments. And what's more, scared that our very relationships are at stake when we disagree about what will best serve those commitments. Scared that if we open our mouths and say the wrong thing we may be ostracized, put in a box, or bludgeoned. Scared that speaking will open us to being misunderstood or misconstrued, our nuances lost..... But it is now when that spirit of inquiry and listening is most important. Because the closed, antagonistic, and avoidant ways we're communicating, understandable as they are, are destroying our people in the very moment we most need to be building our people up.

Link: <http://civility.jewishpublicaffairs.org/2013/12/10/why-civil-discourse-on-israel-must-become-a-national-jewish-priority/>.

## Discussion Questions:

- What does Rabbi Weintraub mean when she says that our current modes of communicating about Israel are “destroying our people”?
- What are your fears, when it comes to Israel?
- How do these fears affect your ability to engage in meaningful conversation about Israel?

You can use the space below to write some notes to yourself.

# DO

As we conclude the conversation, here are a few final questions to consider.

- What's one insight that you've gained from this conversation?
- What is one action you might take, or practice you might try, before we meet next time, based on what you're taking from this conversation?
- What's one obstacle to taking that action? How can you overcome it? Who might you need help from in order to do so?
- What could we do together as a community based on what we talked about today?

You can use the space below to write some notes to yourself.

**Thank you for being part of this conversation.**



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