



## CORNERSTONE 2016 RESOURCE

### Engaging with Israel: Getting Past Either/Or, *Spin It!*

<b>AUTHOR:</b>	Sarra Alpert
<b>SUMMARY:</b>	In this session, participants will learn about various individuals and groups working towards Israeli-Arab coexistence and Israeli-Palestinian partnerships and relationship-building. They will also consider what tools are needed to keep conversations about Israel/Palestine grounded in a place of listening and learning rather than argument and tension. <i>- Submitted by Sarra Alpert</i>
<b>TOPICS:</b>	Global Jewish Community, Israel Programming, Jewish Values, Social Justice, Teen Programs
<b>LEARNING OBJECTIVE:</b>	Participants will have new ideas for how to create programming on Israel/Palestine that helps people emphasize coexistence work rather than pro/anti arguments on particular issues. They will also have new tools for how to approach political conversation from a place of learning and growth rather than disagreement and defensiveness.
<b>AUDIENCE:</b>	This activity is for campers ages 14 and up, or for staff.
<b>LENGTH:</b>	60+ Minutes
<b>APPENDIXES:</b>	Materials from the websites of the following organizations: Combatants for Peace, Rabbis for Human Rights, The Parents Circle Families Forum, Shatil, Al Tariq and Encounter
<b>MATERIALS:</b>	Rope. Paper and pens. Tape. A printout of the papers for the museum exhibit. Small post-its (“flag” type) in three different colors (lots of each color -- at least ten of each color per participant).
<b>SETTING:</b>	Circle of chairs, walls that you can post materials on (these materials should be posted in advance)

#### Session Description:

Start with a game of small-group tug-of-war: give participants lengths of rope. Within each group of four, each pair is pulling on one end of their rope, trying to get it from the other pair. Have participants play for a couple of minutes.

#### Quick debrief:

- What are the options for how tug-of-war ends? Either one group fails or both just pull fruitlessly. If the rope breaks, both sides get hurt.
- In many cases, this is how we approach political arguments, as if it's two sides against each other and only one can win. In most cases, that ends up meaning that neither wins.
- Conversations about Israel/Palestine -- and the actual political realities there -- often fall into that opposing-teams mentality, with an emphasis on the limiting idea that one group's safety or rights can only exist at the expense of the other's.
- We're going to learn about people and organizations in Israel and Palestine who rejected that idea and have found ways to work towards common cause, believing that their peoples can build relationships and commit to finding ways to work towards security and rights for both groups together -- and that in fact a peace grounded in justice requires just such an approach.

To do that, we'll spend some time exploring our Museum Salaam Shalom -- a museum exhibit

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that highlights the following groups:

- Combatants for Peace
- Rabbis for Human Rights
- Shatil
- The Parents Circle
- Al Tariq
- Encounter

For each of these organizations, there are pictures and written paragraphs in the set of attached materials. Next to each organization, also put up blank paper to write on. *Note: please explain that these are selections from the organizations' websites and do not represent the full range of their activities and work. Because of the goal of this program, the selections here are the ones that focus on the groups' relationship-building and coexistence work. People should feel free to explore further on their own (you can give out the list of websites in the appendix so that it's easy for everyone to follow up on their own).*

Give each participant a bundle of post-it flags in three different colors (ideally at least ten of each color per person). Assign each color to one of the following phrases: "I wonder...", "I like..." and "I struggle with..."

Participants will have time to walk around the room and read the different exhibits. They should use their post-it flags to mark the things they wonder about, like or struggle with. If they'd like to expand, they can write additional comments or questions on the paper next to each exhibit. Please emphasize the importance of maintaining a tone of respect and care for each other and for these groups of people.

The amount of time for reading, marking and writing will depend on how long your session is able to be. Once it's time to wrap up this part, ask everyone to choose one of the exhibits that they'd like to discuss further. They should then gather in small groups to discuss that organization and their reactions to it further.

- Why did you choose this organization to continue discussing?
- What did you notice, like, wonder about or struggle with?
- How did the stories and other materials here affirm and/or complicate some of the beliefs, perspectives or narratives you started with?

Come back together to debrief the experience:

- What was challenging about this activity?
- What was exciting about it?
- What did you learn?
- What can you draw out to consider in how to approach contentious conversations about Israel?
- How might those ideas apply to engaging with a spectrum of opinions on any topic or aspect of Jewish life and practice?
- What kinds of tools would you need to prioritize in order to keep these conversations grounded in trust, deep engagement and a genuine desire for understanding? *For*



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*example: active listening, affirmation of shared values, asking real questions about differences rather than coming from a place of judgment).*

- What are some of the defenses/barriers that go up when people are talking about topics that are sensitive to them? How does a program like this one go about circumventing those?

To close, bring out the tug of war ropes again. Have people split into small circles (6-8 people). Each circle has one rope, which everyone should be holding onto while sitting in their circle. Each group should try to use the rope to pull themselves all up together. End by pointing out how the same tools can be used here to bring the group together and pull everyone up.



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### APPENDIXES:

***Note for program facilitators: below you'll find a range of materials you could use for this activity. Feel free to narrow down if needed. It would also be good to enlarge the images and text for printing.***

***Here is also a list of the organizations' websites and other resources. Feel free to hand these out so that people know they can explore the organizations further on their own at a later point:***

- Combatants for Peace: <http://cfpeace.org/>
- Rabbis for Human Rights: <http://rhr.org.il/eng/>
- Shatil: <http://english.shatil.org.il/>
- The Parents Circle: <http://www.theparentscircle.com/>
- Al Tariq: <https://altariq.wordpress.com/>
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There are also programs on cross-cultural and cross-national collaborations at Israel's various universities and educational institutions, such as Haifa University, Oranim, Open University and Hakibbutzim Seminar College.

More organizations focused on nonviolence and coexistence can be found at <http://www.justvision.org/resources/organizations>

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### **Organization #1: Combatants for Peace**

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We are a group of Palestinians and Israelis who have taken an active part in the cycle of violence in our region. We – who, serving our peoples, raised weapons which we aimed at each other and saw each other only through gun sights – have established Combatants for Peace.

The first meetings between Palestinians and Israelis, that eventually led to the establishment of the “Combatants for Peace” movement, centered around the telling of participants’ personal stories. It began with the spontaneous need to learn about the other side and developed into a coherent perception that the way to peace is through a deep recognition of the humanity of the other side. Our personal story, Palestinians and Israelis, is the story of life here, a story of the violence to which we were partners or witnesses but, equally, a story of choosing a path of non-violence and partnership.

Combatants for Peace Personal Stories: Hillel Bardin, Jerusalem



... When we were discharged I decided that I must find Saed and Yusra [Palestinians that Hillel had met during his time as soldier] and try to understand what was going on.

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I went to their house in Jericho and said to them, “I’ve come because I wanted to talk with you, but I could understand if you would not want to talk to an Israeli, and a soldier at that, and I’ll leave if you wish”. Saed invited me in with the Arabic welcome, “Ahalan w’-sahalan.” We sat down and began to talk, when Yusra came in with a small cup of coffee. “I know that it’s Ramadan,” I said, “and I would not like to drink if you are fasting.” “It’s all right,” Saed replied. “I am Muslim, so I will not drink. But you are not, and you are my guest in my house, so I will be pleased to see you drinking.”

From the Israeli press I had understood that the intifada was a new method for achieving the Arabs’ age-old goal of throwing us into the sea. But they both said, “What we all want is our own state next to Israel.” I felt that the Palestinians really had a message of peace, but throwing stones would never convince us. So we agreed that I would bring some Israelis for dialogues with people from Jericho. It was remarkable for us to see how we, as Israelis, could be sitting in Palestinian homes in the intifada with no concern for our security.

For one of the dialogues, we entered a small, one roomed hut. The walls were white-washed, and in one corner was a simple metal bed, the only furniture in the room. On the bed lay an ancient, withered, bone-thin dark-brown man in a white jalabiyye (an ankle-length shirt which traditional men still wear) that looked almost like a shroud. It was hard to tell whether he was still alive, or dead. One of our hosts crouched down next to him and said very softly, “There is a group of Israelis here, who want to talk with us about peace.”

The old man pulled himself together, and very slowly stood up from the bed. He looked like Mahatma Gandhi, only taller and more dignified. Slowly he walked over to me, put his arms around me and kissed me. “Where have you been?” he asked us. “We have been waiting so long.”

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### Organization #2: Rabbis for Human Rights



“Beloved are human beings, for they are created in the image of God”-  
Pirkei Avot 3:18

Founded in 1988, Rabbis for Human Rights is the only rabbinic voice in Israel that is explicitly dedicated to human rights. Representing over 100 Israeli rabbis and rabbinical students from different streams of Judaism, we derive our authority from our Jewish tradition and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Our mission is to inform the Israeli public about human rights violations, and to pressure the State institutions to redress these injustices. In a time in which a nationalist and isolationist understanding of Jewish tradition is heard frequently and loudly, Rabbis for Human Rights give expression to the traditional Jewish responsibility for the safety and welfare of the stranger, the different and the weak, the convert, the widow and the orphan.

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### Pursuing Peace

Israel's Declaration of Independence ends with an appeal for cooperation and good neighborliness for its surrounding states for the advancement of the whole Middle East. "Who is the greatest hero?" asks Avot d'Rabbi Natan (23:1), and answers "One who makes an enemy into a friend."

Based on these principles of faith, we pray and work for peace as envisioned by the prophets of Israel, when "Nation shall not lift up sword against nation; neither shall they learn war anymore" (Isa. 2:4), and when "Justice will well up high as waters, and righteousness as mighty as a stream" (Amos 5:24).



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### Organization #3: The Parents Circle



The Parents Circle - Families Forum (PCFF) is a joint Palestinian Israeli organization of over 600 families, all of whom have lost a close family member as a result of the prolonged conflict. The PCFF was established in 1995 by Mr. Yitzhak Frankental and several bereaved Israeli families. In 1998 the first meetings were held with a group of Palestinians families from Gaza who identified with the call to prevent further bereavement through dialogue, tolerance, peace and reconciliation.

#### Our Mission Statement

- To create a framework of reconciliation between the 2 peoples that takes into account that any peace agreement must include an infrastructure for the process of reconciliation.
- To work towards an end to violence and towards achieving an accepted political agreement.
- To influence the public and the political decision makers to choose dialogue and the path of peace over violence and war in order to achieve a just settlement based on empathy and understanding.
- To avoid the use of bereavement for further violence and retribution.

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From Parents' Circle Personal Stories: Jalal Khudiari

One day, a very significant event occurred. One of my friends died in the Intifada. [Earlier in his life, Jalal's sister had also died in an Israeli army bombing while their family was attempting to leave Palestine and travel to Jordan.] I returned home filled with hatred of the Jews, blood, and the war. My father heard me, and saw how much I was shaken, and he did not speak to me. He is a religious man. Some time later, Jordan Television presented a program on Hitler and the Holocaust, and my father invited me to watch it, without saying anything. I watched and saw. After the showing, he said to me: "I want you to learn something. When you hate somebody, you cannot reflect, when you cannot reflect, you cannot make a good decision. Hatred can only cause you to make errors, and life cannot continue like that. It is necessary that you have a positive role in your own life."

I was a principal in Turkey. I was surprised to discover that there were meetings between Israeli and Palestinian principals. I had reservations. A man told of the death of his son in the explosion of a bus. I did not need many explanations because I had internalized what was pain. The fact of seeing an Israeli feeling pain and loss led me to speak with him, to tell him what had happened to my family. While I was there, I also met Mr. Boaz Kitain who today is the Israeli General Manager of the Parents Circle Family Forum and he spoke to me about an association which was comprised of Jewish and Palestinian families. He invited me to come to see them, to listen, to remain if I wanted to. I did not pursue the invitation. After four months, I received a call from Dr. Adel Misk, the Palestinian representative of this association. He invited me to a meeting in Jerusalem. I answered that I would see, Inshalla (with God's will).

It was not an easy decision to make; I spoke about it to my father and to my sister Salwa, the two most significant people in my life. Salwa, despite everything that occurred, does not have the least trace of hatred or spite in her heart. She told me to go there.

I went to Jerusalem. There were Israeli and Palestinian families. All spoke about pain, and of what we had not gained with violence. That influenced me a great deal. I saw that there was a human aspect, which I was to discover more of. As of that moment, I felt that I had a mission, a national duty. The release of land is not done only with rifles. The Israeli community must be able to see in me somebody who holds tightly onto the hand of peace.

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### Organization #4: Shatil



The New Israel Fund  
Initiative for Social Change

#### Mission

Shatil, the New Israel Fund's Initiative for Social Change, has been on the cutting edge of building civil society and actively promoting democracy, tolerance, and social justice in Israel for 30 years. We work together with activists, organizations, networks, grass-roots groups and social movements in Israel and worldwide. We aspire toward a society based on equality of all citizens and residents of Israel – a society that believes in the principles of social, economic and environmental justice and works to achieve them; a society that promotes human and civil rights, respects religious and cultural differences, and recognizes the importance of a truly shared society.

Shatil headquarters are in Jerusalem, with regional offices in Haifa, and Beersheva.

#### What we work on

**Democracy:** Shatil is invested in safeguarding Israeli democracy, paying a special emphasis to combating anti-democratic legislation and promoting democratic participation.

**Social Justice:** Shatil's Social Justice Initiative combats poverty and reduces social-economic gaps.

**Racism and Shared Society:** Shatil works to combat racism and to advance the creation of a shared society – a society based not only on coexistence and mutual tolerance, but one in which all groups feel a sense of ownership.

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Religious Freedom: Shatil's strengthens the capacities of pluralist organizations, communities and coalitions, provides alternatives to the ultra-Orthodox rabbinate on issues of personal status, and fights against the ongoing exclusion of women from the public sphere.

Israeli Arabs: Shatil works to promote equality in resource allocation and opportunity for Arab and Jewish citizens of Israel alike.

### **Stories from Shatil's Projects:**

#### **Yossi Fitoussi and Zouheir Bahloul, Joint Founders of Acco Group for Joint Living**



A veteran resident of the mixed city of Acco, Yossi Fitoussi watched as more and more of his Jewish friends left the city. "I felt that if Jews and Arabs were to sit together, attitudes would change and people wouldn't leave," says the former community center director and co-founder of the Acco Theater Festival. After Arab-Jewish violence erupted in Acco on Yom Kippur 2008, Shatil approached Yossi's neighbor, Zouheir Bahloul, a well-known media personality, with the idea of starting just such a group. "I understood the violence as arising from increasing pressure that just had to burst," says Zouheir, referring to the problems facing Israeli Arabs. "It was in the aftermath of this crisis that we started our Shatil-led Acco Group for Joint Living. I had my doubts about its potential for success, but Shatil convinced me not to let the darkness rule." Adds Yossi: "The fact that Shatil was a professional, neutral body with knowledge and experience in conflict management and facilitation helped the group thrive. Despite many challenges, we succeeded in writing a document with our vision for a truly joint city and recruited the mayor to our cause. He, in turn, connected us with directors of municipal departments, schools and community centers, so we could promote our ideas throughout the city and bring everyone – native Israeli Jews and Arabs, immigrants from the Caucasus, Ethiopia and Russia – closer together. We are getting people to think anew about joint life in this city."

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### **Organization #5: Al Tariq**

Al-Tariq, the Palestinian Institute for Development and Democracy, is a non-profit organization dedicated to promoting sustainable development and democratic governance in Palestine. We work specifically on issues concerning women and youth, focusing on promoting a culture of nonviolence and implementing development projects that strengthen the Palestinian citizen identity and lay the foundations for a future Palestinian state. We also play an active role in the local community and work as an advocate for greater co-operation among local institutions, as well as with national and international NGOs.

The most important step for any peace process is education. Al-Tariq educates Palestinian and Israeli youth about how to use dialogue as a tool for ending the conflict non-violently. We partner with many national and international NGOs, academic institutions, local councils, farmers, ex-militants and small community groups we are developing new approaches and educational manuals that reflect coexistence, peace, and human rights in the spirit of UNESCO criteria.

We also have several dialogue projects that focus specifically on young leaders and children. Using a variety of mediums — including facilitated workshops, field trips and social media — we work to encourage meaningful dialogue in both societies and between Palestinians and Israelis. One of our projects is the **Non-Violence Summer Camp:**



Since 2006 we have organized 2-week summer camps for children during summer vacations. These camps are attended by large number of children from villages and cities alike. In these camps we teach civic rights and duties at a community level as well as provide a positive alternative to being victims or participants in the conflict that is surrounding them. The students leave the camp with a broader knowledge of their culture and a greater awareness of others.

"We were able to get to know each other and have such a great time together, talking about our dreams and hopes, the conflict and non-violent ways to solve it. Why do we have to feel afraid of each other? How long will the conflict last?" - Mohammed, Young Leader

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"Suddenly life has a different meaning--more beautiful. The aspiration to live a normal life, a life that to the most people seems trivial, this desire unites the worst of enemies. There is no person that truly wants to live in war." - Noam, Young Leader



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### Organization #6: Encounter

Mission: Encounter is a non-partisan educational organization cultivating informed and constructive Jewish leadership on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.



Encounter is an educational organization that cultivates informed Jewish leadership on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. We do not take specific positions regarding the outcome of the conflict. We do, however, hold a set of values that underlie all of our work, including our organizational programs, alumni activities, and staff and board interactions. Our vision is one of genuine peace: an environment of safety and equity that embraces the full dignity of all. Our core values are:

- שמע / Shema / Listening: Encounter cultivates resilient mutual listening and curiosity, between Jews and Palestinians as well as between Jews and other Jews with divergent worldviews.
- כבוד / Kavod / Dignity: Encounter affirms the fundamental dignity of all human beings, and encourages deep respect for the physical, emotional, and spiritual well-being of all people.
- חכמה / Hokhma / Wisdom: Encounter values the persistent seeking of wisdom, understanding, and knowledge, particularly of unfamiliar and differing perspectives.
- רחמים / Rakhmim / Compassion: Encounter encourages all of us to find softness within ourselves, and to extend mercy, graciousness, and the most expansive possible view of each other.
- פתיחת לב / Petikhat Lev / Openness: Encounter encourages receptivity rather than dogmatism, openness to being transformed by new encounters and ideas.
- בכל נפשך / B'khol naf'shekha / Holism: Encounter programs integrate mind, body, and heart—taking into consideration the complexity of learning needs and the fullness of the human person.
- אלו ואלו / Elu v'elu / Multiple voices: Encounter values the multiplicity of voices within societies and even within individuals, knowing our deepest creativity often emerges from contradictions and complexity.



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### **Resources from “Engaging with Israel: Getting Past Either/Or”**

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