

## CORNERSTONE 2017 RESOURCE

### “Wrestling” With Israel *Evening Experience*

<b>AUTHOR(S):</b>	Sarra Alpert and Noam Katz
<b>SUMMARY:</b>	Many Jews, including Jewish educators, have complicated relationships with Israel. As we build better skills for engaging in real conversation about varied opinions and connections to Israel, we'll be better able to bring that range and perspective into how we learn and teach. In this session, you'll be able to share your own perspective, hear from others, consider other approaches to key questions, and work on how to best make space for a range of points of view. <i>–Submitted by Sarra Alpert and Noam Katz</i>
<b>TOPIC(S):</b>	Israel, Jewish Identity, Tools for Dialogue
<b>LEARNING OBJECTIVE:</b>	Participants will have the opportunity to explore their own struggles with their relationship to Israel. They will also build tools for engaging in respectful dialogue and genuine learning, as well as ideas for how to bring their own perspective
<b>AUDIENCE:</b>	Program is designed for staff. Group can be up to about 40 people.
<b>TIMING:</b>	75 minutes
<b>APPENDICES:</b>	“Judgments Into Questions” worksheet, text study source sheet, set of 1st-person experience excerpts, FB emoji cutouts
<b>MATERIALS NEEDED:</b>	Handouts, tape, pens, FB emoji cutouts
<b>SET-UP DETAILS:</b>	Any space with walls (to hang 1st-person excerpts)

#### SESSION TIMELINE & OUTLINE:

- Start by handing out slips of paper with statements relating to Israel. For example:
  - I do not believe there is such a thing as the Occupation.
  - I believe that the Occupation violates the human rights of Palestinians.
  - I support the Boycott/Divestment/Sanctions movement.
  - I believe in the ban against any BDS supporters entering Israel.
  - I do not use the term Palestine.
  - I’m not sure I’m a Zionist.
  - I’m inspired by fervent North American Jewish support of Israel.
  - I’m pained by how the North American Jewish community reacts to Jews who disagree with Israel’s policies.

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- I believe that the Israeli settlements undermine peace between Israelis and Palestinians.
  - I believe that Palestinians don't actually want peace with Israel.
  - I'm not sure I believe in a two-state solution.
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- Each person who received a statement should read their statement out loud (regardless of whether it's a statement they personally agree with). Everyone else should sit and listen to the statements, paying attention to their own reactions. Which statements make you feel angry? Anxious? Relieved? Happy? Indifferent? What do you notice in your reactions throughout hearing these?
  - Take a few minutes to journal about your reactions.
  - Get into pairs. Describe an example you've experienced of a genuine exchange of ideas (the example does not have to have anything to do with Israel). What were the circumstances that made that possible? How did the conversation come about? How did the participants in it treat each other? Were there moments that became heated? If so, how did the participants work through those to understand each other better?
  - Come together as a group. Make a list together of some of the reasons that it can be difficult as a Jewish educator to admit to struggling with your relationship to Israel. Then make a list together of why it's valuable to work towards Jewish spaces that encourage people to bring those struggles in. Note that these lists are unlikely to be revelatory -- they're likely to identify themes that are easy to notice but that might not be ones we're always comfortable talking about (in the case of the struggle list) or ones that we work hard enough to apply to discussions about Israel (in the case of the value list).
  - Break into small groups for text study (see the text study appendix). If you're short on time, just study the first text. If you have more time available, study and discuss all three.
  - Post some excerpts around the room from articles where Jewish leaders/educators/etc. have shared their struggles with their relationship to Israel. Have space for people to respond to "I notice / I wonder / I appreciate" as well as where people see the values from the previous texts represented or not represented.

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- If time, split into small groups to discuss the pieces you read and the themes you saw in people's comments on the readings.
- Spend some time exploring tools for being able to better examine our own beliefs and assumptions. For example:
  - See the "Judgments Into Questions" worksheet (appendix). Ask one pair to come up in front of the room and for each person to go through the questions on the worksheet (with one person posing the questions and the other responding) on an example of their choice. Then split into pairs so that everyone can go through the exercise. Come back together to share: What was difficult about that? What became clearer to you? How might this overall approach/perspective help you in the future?
    - Share some basic information about triggers/activation (how the body reacts to being in a triggered or activated state; how to come to understand some of our own triggers and activations) and tools for how to work through triggered moments.
    - Have a fishbowl conversation where a few people sit and have an honest conversation about their struggles with their relationship to Israel (while the rest of the group observes). The facilitator can take an active role, pausing the conversation to note tools that could be useful (for example, "I haven't heard anyone ask another person a question for awhile") or the observers can offer those kinds of suggestions as well.
    - Listen to clips from the "Fault Lines" podcast where Peter Beinart and Daniel Gordis debate with each other from their very different perspectives. Give out copies of the Facebook emoji printouts (see appendix) so that people can hold up their Likes/etc at appropriate moments as they listen. Discuss: How are Beinart and Gordis able to have meaningful conversation when they disagree about so much? How do you see them listening to each other? How do you see them looking deeply at their own beliefs as well as arguing them?
  - Spend some time discussing and practicing tools for how to speak up in moments when you want to raise a question or concern or alternative perspective in how we approach Israel education. For example:
    - Make a list together of some of the moments at camp when this has come up in the past for people in the room. Share ideas you have for what other options you would have liked to see in those scenarios.
    - Identify what keeps you from feeling ready to have these conversations in your camp setting (or other Jewish communal spaces), what you might need to do to feel more ready, and who in your life can be a support in helping you get there.
    - Role-play some examples of this kind of conversation, either with a few people up in front of the group or with people in pairs or small groups.

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- For closing: discuss the concept of ezer k'negdo, a partner or helper who pushes back against you. How can we show deep support and partnership and help and love in the ways that we push each other forward or push back when we need to speak up? Have participants call out their hopes for how they need to be pushed in a helpful way or how they hope to be able to push in a helpful way.