

# ZIONISM & JUDAISM

## In Conversation

There is no Israel without Judaism, and no Judaism without Israel, and at the heart of Israel is Jerusalem, or Zion. Our return to Zion is like the final piece in the puzzle and a new one all at once.

This can be used as a classroom lesson, an activity run by a youth group leader or community educator, or by parents. Times are to be used as a suggestion. The amount of time spent depends on the educator running the activity/lesson.

**Time:** This activity can be run for an hour or can be adapted for a 30 min activity (minimum time) to suit a variety of groups or learning environments.

**Age:** For children aged 14+

### Objectives

- To learn about Zionism and Judaism, where they conflict and/or intertwine
- To learn about Israel's role as a vital part of Jewish identity
- To become more informed about Israel
- To learn how to debate appropriately

## Supplies Needed

Printed pages of quotes and discussion questions

## Background Preparation

[https://israelforever.org/interact/blog/zionism\\_as\\_judaism/](https://israelforever.org/interact/blog/zionism_as_judaism/)

[https://israelforever.org/interact/blog/re\\_asserting\\_the\\_legitimacy\\_of\\_israel\\_and\\_zionism/](https://israelforever.org/interact/blog/re_asserting_the_legitimacy_of_israel_and_zionism/)

[https://israelforever.org/israel/resources/full\\_resource\\_zionism\\_israel\\_jewish\\_nation\\_state/](https://israelforever.org/israel/resources/full_resource_zionism_israel_jewish_nation_state/)

[https://israelforever.org/interact/blog/saving\\_graces\\_saving\\_israel/](https://israelforever.org/interact/blog/saving_graces_saving_israel/)

## ACTIVITY INTRODUCTION/GETTING STARTED

There are various theories that have evolved, separating Zionism and Judaism as opposing elements. Tell students that they are going to discuss these various theories, some for and some against. There are some lies and distortions that students will discuss.

Students should be divided into pairs/groups of four (depending on how many students are in the group/class). Read the distortion, exaggeration and lie listed below with students and discuss: Why is this a distortion/exaggeration? What is true/untrue about these statements?

Students will then choose a discussion statement to debate. Options are listed below. Emphasize what Yossi Klein Halevi does: educate about our right to be in Israel and the connection with Israel, Judaism and Zionism. He also also trains community leaders to do this as well.

### Educator to introduce Yossi Klein Halevi:

Author, theologian, historian and educator Yossi Klein Halevi has become well known for his powerful books that shed light on different elements of Jewish identity and history. In an interview with the Times of Israel, [Halevi shares anecdotes of wisdom and insight](#) drawn from his years of experience, pain, and memory as an observant Jew who deeply holds on to hope in his heart for peace.

The world generally doesn't understand the relationship in Judaism between religion, peoplehood, land, and national sovereignty. The elements that we take for granted in our identity are almost entirely misunderstood in a gentile world where Jews are seen as a religious minority, rather than as a people with a religious identity, which is how identified Jews have traditionally seen themselves. Assimilated Jews, however, waver on the edge of identity conflicts.

Educator should read the three sections below (distortion, exaggeration, and lie) and discuss with students, then students will choose from one of the discussions listed to debate.

## DISTORTION

**Zionism creates an alternative to the traditional Jewish identity defined by a relationship with Torah and its commandments.** Since Zionism began to take root at the turn of the 20th century, most rabbinic authorities have seen it as a dangerous tool to tear the Jews away from their tradition. They believe that Jewish unity must be articulated around the Torah, rather than the Israeli flag. Zionism and the state of Israel have indeed transformed what it means to be a Jew: from a community bound together by a commitment to the Torah into an ethnic nation committed to a state. This continues to be the main reason for the enduring Judaic opposition to Zionism.

## EXAGGERATION

**Zionism has been a rebellion against Diaspora Judaism and its cult of submission, humility and appeasement.** It has been a valiant attempt to transform the humble Jew relying on divine providence into a intrepid Hebrew relying on his own power. Zionists are the ones who have disdained 2000 years of Jewish experience and if at all, this term may be more applicable to them than to their opponents.

*Yakov Rabkin, Israeli Canadian anti-Zionist professor*

## LIE

**Zionism and Judaism are diametrically opposed because the State of Israel does not reflect Jewish values.**

As stated in IfNotNow's manifesto (on their website): "As we were dehumanized by the oppression we faced, we are now dehumanized by that which we are inflicting. Our elders told many of us that because of our history, we should oppose oppression in all the places it lives, whether it preys upon us or others...Today, the Jewish community is faced with a choice. Will we choose a Judaism that supports freedom and dignity for all Israelis and Palestinians, or will we let the leadership of the establishment define our tradition as incompatible with our values?"

Ultra-Orthodox groups often protest against the State of Israel as being incompatible with a true Torah lifestyle. In March 2014, a mass prayer rally was held in New York City to request Divine intervention against the increased drafting of religious men to the IDF:

"Torah study is what has provided Israel with its security" and the draft of yeshiva (religious) students "was a plot to destroy traditional Judaism." (to *JPost*)

"The Israeli government is looking to destroy religious society and make the country into a secular melting pot." (to *VosizNeias*, a religious news blog)

**Educator should read the following passage aloud:**

*Moses took us out of Egypt and led us to the land known as Canaan, where we had originally come from 210 years prior to our enslavement. Joshua, Moses' protégée, led us further into Canaan after Moses' death. THAT IS the beginning of Zionism: The return to Zion and Jerusalem is Zionism.*

*To those of you that believe Zionism began in 1948 with the state of Israel....think again, because this "Old.... New idea" of 1948 was the continuation of Zionism. We came home to Zion. You see you cannot separate Judaism from Zionism because Judaism is Zionism is Israel.*

**ACTIVITY**

Groups/pairs of students are to choose one of the discussion options listed below. They will discuss this together and come up with several points to refute and to support each statement (if possible to do both). Then one half of the group/pair must argue for and the other against.

**DISCUSS AND DEBATE:**

The notion that Judaism is more than a religion is a revelation to Muslims. That a Jew can be an atheist seems to Muslims inconceivable. If you're a Muslim, or for that matter a Christian, you can't be an atheist. So Judaism works differently than the other monotheistic faiths, because of the foundational identity of peoplehood. This lack of understanding of Jewish identity has direct bearing on the Muslim rejection of the legitimacy of Israel, the expression of the Jewish people's national aspirations.

**DISCUSS AND DEBATE:**

We do ourselves and our cause a terrible disservice by misrepresenting modern Israel as a story founded in European Jewry and the Holocaust; in fact Zionism patently failed to save European Jewry. What we should be internalizing, and explaining to others, is the unique fulfillment of what HaLevi calls the "Zionism of longing" — the half-forgotten story of how we managed to preserve the centrality of the land of Israel in Jewish consciousness, in every corner of the globe where Jews lived for thousands of years. It's one of the most astonishing stories in human history.

**DISCUSS AND DEBATE:**

The wound of the Second Intifada wasn't just that we endured the worst wave of terrorism in our history, but that the terrorism followed two Israeli offers for Palestinian statehood. Its impact on my generation of Israelis was similar to the impact of 1947-48 on the founding generation of Israelis: It convinced us that there was no possibility for finding partners for borders among the current Palestinian leadership.



**DISCUSS AND DEBATE:**

We defend our story to the whole world, but we don't bother explaining ourselves to our neighbors. We are accused of occupying the Palestinians, while their national movement doesn't accept our right to exist. We're rightly outraged by the daily attacks on our history and legitimacy that fill the Palestinian media and the Arab world's media. But we've never tried to tell them our story.

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**DISCUSS AND DEBATE:**

The elements of our identity that we take for granted are exactly what we need to explain to others about ourselves: Who are we? What is our relationship to this land? What does it mean that we maintained a kind of vicarious indigenism with this land through 2,000 years of exile? What is Zionism? What is the relationship between Zionism and Judaism? Why are we the only people in history that managed, after thousands of years, to return to its land? In short: What is our story? And for me, the essence of Judaism is its story. I would define the Jews as a story we tell ourselves about who we think we are.

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**DISCUSS AND DEBATE:**

What is happening to us in the twenty-first century is that the Jewish story of the twentieth century is being turned into its opposite – not a story of courage and faith and persistence but of evil. More than 70 years of siege and delegitimization against Israel. Zionism's great and irreversible achievement is to have re-indigenized the Jewish people in this land.

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**Additional Discussion Questions:**

- In your own words describe the connection between Judaism and Zionism as you see it. If someone asked you to explain Zionism what would you say?
- Can you share a dream you have had for a long time?
- Why do you think the Jewish people kept the dream of returning to Israel alive for 2,000 years?
- Do you think it is important to share the historical background of the Jewish people's ties to Israel?
- What do you want others to know about the connection between Zionism and Judaism?
- Do you think it would help people understand the role of Israel in the lives of the Jewish people if they understand the history?
- When thinking about Israel, what makes you most proud?

## EVALUATION/CONCLUSION

Students present their debate to the rest of the class, show who won the debate and why. They should say if they personally agree or disagree with the discussion and why.

## ABOUT THE ISRAEL FOREVER FOUNDATION

The Israel Forever Foundation is an Israel engagement organization that develops and promotes experiential learning resources that celebrate and strengthen the personal connection to Israel as an integral part of Jewish life and identity.

**We hope you have enjoyed using this resource. Your feedback matters. Please take a minute to fill out our [evaluation form](#) and help us be as effective as possible in providing the resources and tools you need to make the personal Israel connection come to life, whatever your age, wherever you are in the world.**