



**THE COALITION OF
INNOVATING CONGREGATIONS**

An initiative with The Jewish Education Project
with funding from UJA-Federation of New York

The Five Essential Conversations

Setting the Table for Israel Learning
2014 - 2015

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For questions or tech problems **before the webinar begins:** contact Jessica Rothbart at jrothbart@jewishedproject.org or 646-472-5347. **At any point during the webinar:** private message “Gary Hartstein” or “Host” for help.



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The Coalition of Innovating Congregations Welcomes you! *Bruchim Haba'im!*



*This year does not begin as it usually does.
All of us have been impacted by what's happening in Israel.*

Goals

Knowledge:

The questions the community is asking
Steps to engage with and facilitate generative conversation

Doing:

Engage/Facilitate conversations in service of Israel education

Believing / Valuing:

Reflect on the risk and benefit of facilitating Israel education conversations

Belonging:

Connecting with peers who are taking the same risk
Increase connection within my own organization around Israel Education

What we are Hearing from You

The Jewish Education Project recognizes this not a normal start of the year. We participated in “make meaning” conversations with over **150** educators and **50** parents.

We heard...

- Increased awareness about Israel
- Increased awareness about anti-Semitism
- Increased debate and questioning within the Jewish community
- Increased questions raised about Israel and Jews in the media

Time is shifting now:

- Increased turmoil, attention, concern and potential for support / division
 - Questions about a sustainable peaceful future
 - Where will we be in September?

Context of many organizations around Israel:

- One belief, other voices not welcomed
- Avoidance, this is complicated, so we avoid it

Questions You are Asking

- What questions are you holding around Israel education?
- What questions are being raised in your community around Israel education?



Five Essential Conversations

1. What sense am I making of what is happening in Israel and Gaza?
2. What conversations do I have with leadership to establish our values and point of view?
3. How do we help teachers navigate their individual points of view and the congregation's values?
4. How can we help parents engage with their children and make sense of it all?
5. Is it time for a "new" Israel curriculum?

Text: Our Kavanah



Deuteronomy 10:16 (from Parashat Eikev - this past week's Torah portion)

טז ומלתם את ערלת לבבכם;
וערפכם--לא תקשו, עוד.

(Cut away, therefore, the thickening about your hearts, and stiffen your necks no more.)

(*Literally- Circumcise, therefore, the foreskin of your heart, and stiffen your necks no more.*)

Isaiah 50:4 (from last week's Haftarah, the Second Haftarah of Consolation - Parashat Eikev)

ד יַעִיר בַּבֶּקֶר בַּבֶּקֶר יַעִיר לִי אָזֶן לִשְׁמֹעַ בַּלְמוּדִים.

Morning by morning God awakens me, awakens my ear: teaching me to listen. *Isaiah 50:4*

The Rodef Shalom Communication Agreement

1. I will **feel free to continue to express, and allow for others to express, different viewpoints** in the spirit of *machloket leshem shamayim*, as the Mishnah (Ethics of Our Fathers, 5:17) describes the dispute between Bet Shamai and Bet Hillel.
2. I will express my viewpoints in a **thoughtful and respectful manner**, keeping in mind the need to avoid hurting or delegitimizing others and their points of view, as the Talmud (Sanhedrin 24a) describes Torah scholars in the Land of Israel "who treated each other graciously when engaged in debate."
3. I will make **"I" rather than "you" statements**, as Sarah did in her difficult conversation with Abraham when she shared with him her deep feelings of hurt and humiliation from her perspective. (Targum Yonatan, Genesis 16:5).
4. I will **keep listening, even when it is hard, and will not interrupt others** as the rabbis teach: "Listen attentively to the words of the other, and do not be quick to respond" (Derech Eretz Zuta 2:3).
5. I will say **"pass, or pass for now" if I feel emotionally unable to express myself or continue listening in a respectful and constructive manner**, as the Mishnah (Ethics of Our Fathers 3:13) teaches "A fence around wisdom is silence."
6. I **will be aware of the assumptions I am making, acknowledge the limits of my own knowledge and experience, and be open to admitting that I may sometimes be mistaken**, as the Mishnah says: "A wise person admits to what he has not heard and admits when he is wrong" (Ethics of Our Fathers 5:7).
7. I **affirm the above principles and will try to practice them in all my interactions with others**. I also acknowledge that I may not always succeed in keeping to these principles, yet I look forward to being respectfully reminded of my commitment, allowing me, if necessary, to **apologize promptly for any hurtful words** I may say, as the Talmud (Yoma 87a) says: "Whoever offends someone else, even through words, must go and reconcile him."

We gratefully acknowledge the inspiration of [communication agreements produced by The Public Conversations Project, Encounter, GEVIM and others.](#)

Template for the Conversations

1. **Stop**: Give people quiet time to breathe.
2. **Pose three kinds of questions** to understand ourselves and to understand others (sacred listening):
 - a) ***Clarifying Questions*** (i.e. *What do we know? What do we think we know?*)
 - b) ***Interpretive Questions*** (i.e. *What is the meaning of what we know? What story do we tell about what we know?*)
 - c) ***Reflective Questions*** (i.e. *How do we feel - about our knowledge, our stories, our world, and ourselves?*)
3. **Move talk to action**: Turn emotion and talk to lived action.

Josh Feigelson of Hillel International, [Ask Big Questions](#):

www.theicenter.org/voices/three-questions-ask-during-war-and-during-peacetime-too

Template to Put in Action

1. *Set context, with no judgment, for making sense, to be heard and to be supported*
2. *Time for quiet reflection, jotting, journaling*
3. *Be heard with a protocol*
4. *Gather for many voices, permissions*
5. *Uncover action steps*

Sample Questions

Here are **five** questions for you to contemplate. You won't have to share anything that you don't want to. Feel free to answer any or all of the questions.

- 1) *How have recent events in Israel and Gaza affected you?*
- 2) *What questions or uncertainties are you wrestling with?*
- 3) *Is there anything you are confused about?*
- 4) *How are you navigating the news and/or social media in your quest to understand what's happening? What's helpful and what's challenging?*
- 5) *In your role as an educator/communal professional is there anything you feel you need to act on? What are you most hopeful about?*

Sample Facilitation

Facilitators: Setting the tone for welcoming, safe space and sharing – no judgment or persuasion.

Welcome: Thank each person for being willing to share. Keep in mind the questions we are grappling with:

- *How do I make sense of what is going on?*
- *What can I do to support my fellow educator who is also trying to make sense of the crisis?*
- *What can I do for my learners?*

Introductions: Facilitators, introduce yourselves, explain that your role is to keep time, make sure everyone has a voice, and to help if needed, to remind us to use special listening skills noted in the conversation agreement. Ask each person to share their name and their role.

Directions to begin conversation: Each person will have a minute or so to review what they wrote in the journaling questions. Invite people, if they find it helpful, to share the part(s) they want to share. They may choose to share nothing, and rather speak about something that came up for them during the writing process. Each person will then have three minutes to share what they have chosen.

Directions for listening: After each person shares, please help that individual know she or he has been heard. Phrases like: “Thank you for sharing,” or “That was brave,” or “I appreciated hearing what you are thinking.”

After everyone has shared, open the conversation with these conversation starters:

What did you hear that stood out? Is there something you want to understand further? What evoked a response in you? Is there something coming up for you? → This cycle of sharing and understanding can continue by asking participants: Is there something else from your journaling you’d like to share?

Close: Thank all participants for making space for each other, reminding them what is said here remains here. We hope this conversation has been helpful. You can invite people to think about feasible next steps.

Help Shape a Conversation

Choose one of the conversations below and with a group of educators on this webinar, create an agenda for a safe, generative conversation regarding the current situation in Israel:

1. Conversation with leadership of your organization (Rabbi, Chazzan, President of the Board).
2. Conversation with teachers of your school.
3. Conversation with parents of students in your religious school.

Select one you'd like to work on with your colleagues and **type 1, 2, or 3** into the chat box on the bottom right side of your screen to be sorted into breakout groups.

You'll have 15 minutes to create and then share with others.

Create Your Sample Agenda

1. Help people stop – Breathe

2. Ask questions for understanding *sacred listening*

a) **Clarifying Questions** (i.e. What do we know? What do we think we know?)

b) **Interpretive Questions** (i.e. What is the meaning of what we know? What story do we tell about what we know?)

c) **Reflective Questions** (i.e. How do we feel - about our knowledge, our stories, our world, and ourselves?)

3. Move people to action

Sample Template

Goals:

Connection Question: Help people stop and breathe

Text: (e.g.) Rodeph Shalom, The Seven Rules of Listening

Core Discussion:

a) **Clarifying Questions** (i.e. What do we know? What do we think we know?)

b) **Interpretive Questions** (i.e. What is the meaning of what we know? What story do we tell about what we know?)

c) **Reflective Questions** (i.e. How do we feel - about our knowledge, our stories, our world, and ourselves?)

Reflection: How do we feel about the stories we are telling/listening to?

Next Steps/Action: What actions to take?

Think about Risks

- Are there risks involved in engaging in these conversations?
- Are there risks in not engaging in these conversations?



What's Your Next Step?



More Resources

1. The Jewish Dialogue Group:

www.jewishdialogue.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=73:guidebooksupplements&catid=37&Itemid=88

2. The iCenter – Three Questions to Ask during a War (and during Peacetime, too):

www.theicenter.org/voices/three-questions-ask-during-war-and-during-peacetime-too

3. The Times of Israel: <http://blogs.timesofisrael.com/>

4. Committee for Accurate Middle East Reporting. The organization watches reports coming from the Middle East and critiques news channels and papers: www.camera.org

5. The David Project provides a number of resources to help you investigate historical and contemporary issues related to Israel: www.davidproject.org/resources/israel-discussion-guides

6. An extensive list of more resources: www.thejewisheducationproject.org/Israel-Education-Resource-Guide

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