

Yes We Can:

The American Jewish Connection to Israel, Obama and Me[a1]

Goal: To provide a context, both historical and in terms of points of views, for American Jews to consider the ramifications and implications of a possible divergence of opinion between the U.S. administration and the Israeli government regarding the political process in the Middle East. In particular, the peulah focuses on the ways in which this recent perceived shift in US-Israel relations touches on deeper questions of Jewish identity, the Jews relationship to Israel and Israel's future.

Structure: The activity is built in four parts:

- a) an optional opening scenario which might make the subject matter more accessible for teens.
- b) A set of value statements which can be used in value clarification exercises
- c) A time line of US-Israel relations to provide historical perspective and context
- d) Two articles expressing views on how North American Jews should respond when US and Israeli perspectives publically differ.

Part One: Opening Scenario

(This might be an appropriate way to start the peulah for some groups. It creates a parallel with the complex set of relations between the US and Israel in terms that might be more approachable for teenagers. On the other hand, for other groups it might lack the complexity and immediacy of dealing directly with the subject matter. Feel free to use your discretion. This can also be prepared as a skit and then analyzed by the group)

Duke is the strongest kid in school and is widely recognized as the social leader of his grade as well as the most accomplished student and a great athlete. His family is one of the pillars of the community, and his mother is on the city council. Cory is Duke's close friend; they have been close friends since grade school and Cory's family has often been hosted by Duke's family on weekends and holidays. Cory is a small kid, less talented than Duke, and his family is marginal in the community. At times the differences between Cory and Duke have created tension and distance, but their friendship goes back so long, and is rooted in many shared experiences, that it has survived and is maybe even stronger than it was years ago. Corey is temperamental, and when he is picked on, which happens quite often when Duke is not around, he gets angry and tends to react passionately and sometimes even violently.

This interaction creates tension in the school and makes many kids like Corey even less. In the past, other kids have come to Duke and asked him why he is so close with Corey, given that he can sometimes be obnoxious and nasty. Duke has answered simply that Corey is my friend- if you left him alone, you would see how cool he could be. Two days ago, in one of those frequent run ins with Corey, he reacted fiercely and lost control of himself. When a kid named Rodney insulted Corey's family, he punched him in the face and bloodied his nose.

The next day Corey followed Rodney home and then punctured his bike's tires and wrecked his chain. This morning, Rodney's friends came to Duke and told him that Corey is out of control and that a lot of kids are starting to think that maybe Duke is at fault for not stopping him.

They ask Duke to get involved and distance himself from Corey. Duke has a dilemma- he is Corey's friend from way back and he really likes him and feels a deep connection with him. He also knows that without his protection, Corey is likely to get badly hurt. On the other hand, he isn't sure if Corey did the right thing and is worried that he can't control him just through his friendship.

1. Do you identify with Duke? Do you identify with Corey?
2. What should Duke do?
3. What are the advantages of Duke openly criticizing Corey?
4. What are the advantages of Duke maintaining his solidarity and friendship with Corey?
5. Do you see any parallels between this situation and the relations between the United States and Israel? What are the similarities and differences between the two situations?

Part Two: Looking at Israel-United States relations in the historical context. The purpose of this section of the peulah is to see the current situation in a historical context, both to note recurring themes, and to give people a sense of overall direction in the development of the relationship. This section can be done in a couple of different ways:

- a) Have each person read aloud one event
- b) In advance create a time line (events can be put up around the room or on a big piece of butcher paper in the middle of the floor), and give people a chance to respond to events by marking their reactions on a poster board or piece of paper near each event: surprise, pride, disagreement, anxiety, worry etc.
- c) Discussion Questions: Over the last three centuries, US relations with Jewish national aspirations and with the State of Israel have gone through many changes.
 1. As you look at the timeline below, do you recognize any patterns or common themes?
 2. On the whole, do you believe that US-Israel relations are improving, stable or weakening?
 3. What actions can you take to impact this relationship?
 4. What is your vision of US-Israeli relations

18th Century- Hebrew is used as language at some American Universities, Children of Israel theme suggested by Jefferson as United States Government seal.

Early 19th Century- John Adams and Abraham Lincoln articulate support for Jews return to their ancient homeland

Late 19th Century: Prominent Americans like Emma Lazarus, Supreme Court Chief Justice and Speaker of the House call for international consideration of the Jewish claim to Palestine.

1910's-1920's- President Wilson, the US Congress and State legislatures publically support the Balfour Declaration which calls for Great Britain (who had control of Palestine) to view with favor the creation of a Jewish national home in Palestine.

1947- US government supports UN resolution to partition Palestine and establish a Jewish state in part of Palestine.

1948- The United States is the first country to recognize the new State of Israel

1948-9 US President Truman refuses to ship American arms to Israel during the War of Independence

1948-62 US arms embargo to Israel

1962-8 US Presidents, starting with President Kennedy, authorize major arms sale from US to Israel as part of policy of evenhandedness to both the Israeli and Arab sides of the conflict.

1967 An American naval intelligence boat, the USS Liberty, is attacked by Israeli warships in Egyptian waters during the 6 Day War. Israel claims the boat was attacked in error and apologizes.

1968 President Johnson, after the 6 Day War, and as a result of the growing pro-Israeli lobby in America, authorizes major sale of Phantom fighter jets to Israel. America becomes chief arms supplier to Israel and American policy becomes to preserve Israel's strategic advantage vis a vis the Arab States.

1970- American Secretary of State William Rogers advances the Rogers plan to facilitate Israeli withdrawal from territories Israel gained in the Six Day War. The Israeli Government does not endorse the plan.

1973- US emergency airlift to Israel during the Yom Kippur War enables Israel to drive back early Arab advances. After Israel isolates the Egyptian Third Army and threatens to take Cairo, the US government forces Israel to accept a truce and end the fighting.

1976-80 Carter Presidency: direct US engagement in securing peace treaty between Israel and Egypt and framework for agreement between Israel and the Palestinians leads to some

tension between the US and Israel. Israel now allowed to sell military equipment in US and limited joint US-Israeli military activities take place.

1981 Public dispute and tension between the US and Israel over Israeli objection to President Reagan's intent to sell AWACS early warning systems to Saudi Arabia. The sale is made despite Israeli protests.

1981 President Reagan, emphasizing Israel's potential to curb Soviet interests in the Middle East, signs the Memorandum of Understanding with Prime Minister Begin, launching an era of official strategic cooperation. Israel officially labeled US strategic ally.

1985- Jonathan Pollard and his wife arrested for espionage, and charged with selling classified documents to Israel. Israel distances itself officially from Pollard's actions but subsequent Israeli governments consistently ask for him to be pardoned.

1987- Israel officially labeled a major non-NATO ally. US begins \$3 billion annual grant in economic and military assistance.

1987-Present – Military and security cooperation grows deeper and wider between the two countries. Series of trade and economic agreements which have opened up markets, improved Israel's balance of payments and economic strength and allowed American aid to flow to Israel for a variety of purposes.

1989- First Bush Administration – US Secretary of State James Baker publically calls for Israel to abandon its expansionist policies and calls East Jerusalem occupied territory. During the first Gulf War, Israel displays restraint despite being attacked by Iraq and is praised by the US for doing so.

1992-1999 Clinton Administration- President Clinton's active involvement and friendship with Prime Minister Rabin leads to a peace treaty with Jordan and the Oslo accords between Israel and the PLO. Near the end of this period, direct attempts to reach a peace agreement between Israel and the PLO fail.

2000-2008 George W. Bush Administration- Good relations between President Bush and Prime Minister Sharon, and the US focus on the global war on terror, leads to improvements in US-Israeli relations. The US recognizes for the first time the need for future peace agreements to take into account major population centers already established by Israel over the green line. The Israeli disengagement from Gaza in 2005 is welcomed by the US government.

2008-9 Obama Administration: President Obama's desire to open up a new pattern of relations with the Muslim world raises worries in Israel that the US might adopt a new stance regarding Israeli policies. President Obama publically calls for Israel to stop its settlement activity in the West Bank while reaffirming the basic alliance between the two countries.

Part Three: Values Clarification- What is my vision of the relationship between Israel and the United States. How Does that Affect Me?

Possible Implementations:

- a) In pairs or small groups of three participants, each statement is read aloud and then each participant indicates on a scale of 5 (full agreement) to 1 (complete disagreement) how much they agree or disagree.
- b) in small groups, each participant chooses one statement they most agree with and one they most disagree with.
- c) The participants are divided into small groups and each group is given one statement to discuss. At the end, that group presents its findings to the large group.
- d) Fishbowl- volunteers are asked to discuss question # 1 in front of the whole group. During that conversation, new volunteers replace the original group and continue the conversation. After a few minutes, the facilitator asks the new group question # 2 and then the process continues until all of the questions have been covered.

1. When the Israeli government pursues a policy with which I disagree with it adversely affects my relationship with Israel
2. When the American government and Israeli government disagree, my natural tendency is to side with the American position
3. Since I don't live in Israel, I don't have the right to question Israeli government policy
4. I am convinced that American support for Israel is deeply rooted in America's national interest and therefore I am not worried that it will weaken.
5. America supports Israel mainly because of the deep solidarity of American Jews with Israel and their support for Israel's policies.
6. Israel should do what it thinks is right to enhance its security and national interest, regardless of what America thinks
7. American support should be the most important policy objective for Israel; the Israeli government should never do anything to put that in jeopardy.

After reviewing all of the statements, think about the statement that you most identify with and explain why to your partner (if this was done in chevruta) or to the group.