

“Let’s Talk”: 40 Years of Occupation A Brit Tzedek v’Shalom Organizing Guide

In February 2007, Brit Tzedek v’Shalom launched the national “Let’s Talk” campaign (letstalk.btvshalom.org) to end the silence and stagnation that surround the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

We are increasing discourse within the American Jewish community and mobilizing support for active U.S. engagement to achieve a negotiated resolution.

At meetings with our elected leadership in home districts across the country and on Capitol Hill, we are calling on the Administration and members of Congress to advocate for vigorous U. S. leadership to bring the parties back to the negotiating table.

In Jewish communities across the country, we are hosting speaking tours and house parties, discussion groups and panel discussions, to explore the many ways to be pro-Israel and pro-peace, and to make certain that all voices are heard.

This guide is intended to provide you with further opportunities for discussion, activity, and action as part of the Let’s Talk campaign. If you have any questions, please email Campaign Director, Carinne Luck Carinne@btvshalom.org or call (212) 366 1670.

For Israel’s Sake. For America’s Sake. For the sake of all who live in the Middle East...

Let’s Talk!

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Introduction

Many of us look back on 1967 with mixed feelings. On the one hand, it was the year in which the illusion that the Jewish State could easily be destroyed was shattered; on the other hand, it marked the beginning of 40 years of occupation.

The Six-Day War (June 5-10, 1967), was viewed as an unprecedented success both in Israel and by the Jewish community around the world. Israel overwhelmingly defeated the armies of Egypt, Jordan, and Syria, with only minimal losses and took over huge swaths of new territory—East Jerusalem and the West Bank from Jordan, the Sinai Peninsula and Gaza from Egypt, and the Golan Heights from Syria – irrevocably changing the character of the region.

There was an air of optimism: secular Israelis flocked to Jerusalem's ancient streets as the religious flocked to West Bank sites they had once known only from the Bible. Families whose homes were previously threatened by sniper fire finally lived in peace. For many, the scope of the victory was seen as nothing short of miraculous, and a new sense of ethnic pride was born among Diaspora Jewry.

Among Palestinians, the feeling was, of course, far different. The refugee population grew, and it became clear that Jewish nationalism was not something that would pass soon from the world. Some Palestinians were able to see Israel in a more realistic light, as they came into personal contact with Israelis for the first time; For most, however, the results of the Six Day War brought on a deep sense of humiliation and powerlessness.

Internationally, there was finally a sense that Israel was here to stay, and among some Israelis, there was great optimism that the Arabs would now take Israel's existence seriously and eagerly negotiate a peace agreement. At the same time, though, many religious Jews and Christians interpreted the war's outcome as a fulfillment of God's promise. Much of the land, particularly in the West Bank, was the historical cradle of Judaism and many felt powerful religious and national claims to the very lands others thought might be exchanged for peace.

Ironically, the overwhelming Israeli victory increased the appeal of the two-state solution to the conflict. Although partition had been proposed by the United Nations in 1947, it was considered unacceptable to the Arabs. And for most of the period from 1949 to 1967, Israelis conceived of peace solely with the other Arab states and not with Palestinians. This changed after 1967 as the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) was strengthened and emerged as an independent player. Later in the 1970s and 1980s it would begin a slow transition from a one-state rejectionist position towards a two state position.

Over the past 40 years, Israelis and Palestinians have experienced bloodshed, violence, and war. No one has been spared from this cycle of sorrow. In particular, the settlements have made it increasingly difficult to bring about a peaceful resolution – to Israel's detriment.

Today, more than 180,000 Jewish Israelis have made their homes in East Jerusalem neighborhoods and 270,000 in settlements and outposts on the West Bank. The settlers and the military have left Gaza but Israel continues to control the borders, air and sea – a fact that according to most interpretations of international law means that Israel remains Gaza’s occupying power. Israel annexed East Jerusalem and declared unified Jerusalem the country’s “eternal capital,” but it has yet to be recognized as such by any country in the world. A rapidly growing separation barrier snakes around settlements and Arab neighborhoods in Jerusalem, separating neighbor from neighbor with barbed wire and high concrete walls, dramatically undermining peace opportunities.

Despite the '67 victory, the past 40 years have not assured Israel's future well-being and security. While Israel has signed peace treaties with Egypt (1979) in which the Sinai was returned, and Jordan (1994) that have ended formal hostilities, popular opinion in those countries remains hostile towards Israel largely because of its policies towards the Palestinians. Occupation, settlement, and the resultant cycle of violence have meant that while Israel itself may no longer be threatened, its people continue to live in fear and uncertainty, mourning losses brought about by military solutions that cannot resolve the conflict.

But we can choose to change the story for the next 40 years. Strong U.S. leadership and genuine, ongoing diplomatic engagement leading to the creation of a Palestinian state living side-by-side with Israel, can create a future marked by peace and promise, not sorrow and despair.
For Israel's sake, for America's sake, for all who live in the Middle East:

“Let's Talk” about how we as American Jews can help facilitate the conditions that will bring about a peaceful resolution of the conflict. Israel's well-being depends on it.

Discussion Guide

1. Do you remember the Six-Day War in 1967? What do you remember hearing? If you don't remember hearing about the war at that time, when did you learn about it, and what were you told? How did you feel at the time?
2. Has your perspective changed since your first heard about the war? If it has changed, what caused the change? What has been the process to your new perspective? Did it affect you emotionally?
3. Have you ever been to Israel? If so, when? Did you visit the occupied territories? If so, what did you see there? If you have been multiple times, what changes have you seen over time?
4. Has your relationship to Israel changed over time? If so, how?
5. What makes you hopeful/concerned about the prospects for a negotiated peace and an end to the occupation?
6. Why is it important to hold onto a vision of peace and what concrete steps can you take to make it a reality in this 41st year of occupation and beyond?

Suggested Activities

- Watch the first episode in Chaim Yavin's documentary film series, "Land of the Settlers" using the Yavin discussion guide, (Appendix I). [Email chapter@btvshalom.org to borrow the DVD from our film library]
- Hold a "Let's Talk" house party, and replace the David Grossman section with a discussion on the 40th anniversary of the Occupation. [You can find the house party guide at <http://letstalk.btvshalom.org/pledge/hostparty> or email Carinne carinne@btvshalom.org for a hard copy].
- Hold a chapter meeting to recognize the "40th Anniversary of the '67 War and the Occupation;" use the discussion guide (above) and review the 40th Anniversary FAQs to help frame your program.
- Read and have a discussion group about "The Accidental Empire: Israel and the Birth of the Settlements, 1967-1977: by Gershon Gorenberg.
- Participate in June 5th activities:
 - Hold a speak-out – "Let's Talk About 40 Years of Occupation"
You can use one or more of the questions from the discussion guide as the trigger for people to speak out, especially questions 5 and 6. You can organize this in the style of England's famous Hyde Park "Speaker's Corner." You can get a "Let's Talk" banner made and have people speak out in front of it. Good way to get folks' attention.
 - Have people create 1min videos in which they discuss the meaning of the 40th Anniversary. All you need is a digital video camera mounted on a tripod and we can help edit them for you. If we get enough of these, we might feature them on the Let's Talk website and/or our Brit Tzedek Youtube channel.
 - Conduct a listening project and include a question on how American Jews can work to bring peace between Israelis and Palestinians at this time. [see Listening Project, Appendix II]
- Hold a call-in day to your Members of Congress. Email Brit Tzedek's Washington Representative, Rob Levy rob@btvshalom.org for talking points and background on your Members.
- Hold a letter writing party, and write Letters to the Editor and/or letters to your elected officials [see Letter to the Editor Talking Points, Appendix III; Email Brit Tzedek's Washington Representative, Rob Levy, for Legislative talking points rob@btvshalom.org]
- Hold a vigil/ceremony in memory of all civilians from "both sides" who died as a result of the ongoing occupation and conflict.

- You can organize a silent vigil with candles; or hold a ceremony in which people get together to sing peace songs, or read various poetry from Israel and Arab nations.
- Or you can have a more creative approach: Make a sign that reads: In 1967, Israel won the war, but Israel did not win the peace (or something to that effect). Behind it, create a physical representation of the number of civilians who died in a certain period (B'Tselem has statistics on number of civilian dead during 2nd Intifada, for example)
 - You can use anything to mark number of civilians i.e. flowers, shoes, stones, construction paper doves etc... (Email Carinne Carinne@btvshalom.org to hear about how one group of teens chose to honour Israeli and Palestinian fatalities)

Appendix I:

Letters to the Editor

Talking Points and Samples

Talking points for letters to the editor

- During the 1967 Six Day War, the Jewish people moved from existential fear to unbridled joy. Fighting Egypt, Jordan and Syria for its survival, Israel emerged stunningly victorious.
- As American Jews, we look back at 1967 with mixed feelings; on the one hand, the illusion was shattered that the state of Israel could be destroyed; on the other hand, this marked the beginning of 40 years of occupation.
- 40 years later, Israelis still live in fear.
- The end of the war marked the beginning of the occupation and settlement project, which has actually made Israel less secure. Israel has been in a state of hostilities with the Palestinians ever since, and has not achieved normal relations with most of the Arab world.
- The continued construction of settlements makes it increasingly difficult to resolve the conflict, creating facts on the ground at the expense of true compromise.
- The past 40 years have brought despair to Israelis and Palestinians alike. No one has been spared bloodshed, destruction and heartbreak.
- As painful as the past is, we can change the prospects for the next 40 years.
- Strong US leadership, and genuine, ongoing diplomatic engagement leading to a mutually acceptable, two-state solution can create a future marked by peace and promise, not sorrow and despair.
- Real Middle East diplomacy is in America's best interests as well, given the increasing violence and unrest in parts of the region.
- Military solutions, as demonstrated by the last summer's war in Lebanon, are no solution at all. Only dialogue can end the conflict. Israel's well-being and security depend on it.
- Despite the clear set-back over the past two weeks, the Arab League Initiative and Secretary Rice's renewed commitment to engage in achieving a resolution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict offer distinct opportunities for progress towards a political solution that will provide long-term peace and security for both Israelis and Palestinians. As Jordan's King Abdullah said in his opening address to the World Economic Forum in Jordan on May 18th, as the fighting raged in Gaza: "There is an historic opportunity to achieve a just, comprehensive and lasting settlement, and achieve it now; this year; before any more generations suffer; before any more destruction takes place."

Letter to the Editor I

To the editor,

In the coming [weeks] [days], the world will mark 40 years since the Six Day War, in which Israel emerged victorious, but which led to Israel's occupation of Palestinian lands, as well as its extensive construction of settlements on those lands.

In commemoration of the destruction and loss of life on both sides – and with the hope that the recent rocket attacks into Israel and the violence in Gaza will end soon – the [city] chapter of Brit Tzedek v'Shalom, the Jewish Alliance for Justice and Peace, will be holding several activities as part of Brit Tzedek's [Let's Talk campaign] [involvement in world-wide June 5th events, marking the 40th anniversary of the war].

[Information on activities – no more than 30-50 words]

Brit Tzedek recognizes that only genuine negotiations will lead to a lasting settlement, and that US leadership is vital to move this forward. We encourage our fellow citizens to take part in these events and help start the dialogue in our community.

Thank you,

Letter to the Editor II

To the editor,

The coming [weeks] [days] mark 40 years since the Six Day War, in which Israel emerged victorious, but began occupation of Palestinian lands, as well as its extensive construction of settlements on those lands.

Despite the alarming recent return to violence, the Arab League Initiative - through which the Arab world would normalize its relations with Israel, in exchange for a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict - and Secretary Rice's renewed commitment to engage in achieving a resolution to the conflict continue to offer political solutions which provide long-term peace and security for both Israelis and Palestinians

As Jordan's King Abdullah said at the World Economic Forum in Jordan on May 18th, while fighting raged in Gaza: "There is an historic opportunity to achieve a just, comprehensive and lasting settlement, and achieve it now; this year; before any more generations suffer; before any more destruction takes place."

As an American Jew, I believe Israel and America will both be served best by reviving peace talks so that 40 years from now, 2007 will be acknowledged as the year Israel and its neighbors finally started on the path to peace.

Sincerely,

Appendix II: Chaim Yavin's *Land of the Settlers* Discussion and Viewing Guide

Introduction

The five documentaries by Israeli anchorman Chaim Yavin entitled, *The Land of the Settlers* are excellent tools to educate American Jews about the impact of the settlements and the occupation on Israelis and Palestinians and to promote activism to end the occupation. This guide includes tips on how to use the documentary as an effective educational and organizing tool within your chapter and in your local Jewish community.

Educational Role

The films include footage of:

- the origins of the settlements
- interviews with longtime and recent settlers including explanations of messianic Zionism
- interviews with Palestinians at checkpoints, in hospitals, in their fields, under curfew, at home
- interviews with Palestinians and Israelis who have lost loved ones in the conflict
- suicide bombings in Israel
- confrontations between Israeli peace activists and settlers

Organizing Role

The graphic illustration of the problems associated with the settlements can be helpful in motivating American Jews to take concrete steps to encourage the U.S. government to help end the occupation of the West Bank by implementing the Road Map which includes a freeze on settlement growth and dismantlement of settlement outposts, and negotiations between the Israelis and Palestinians leading to the creation of a Palestinian state.

Note: Our call to bring the settlers home focused on providing compensation to those who wanted to voluntarily return. Neither of the first two films focuses at all on that population.

I. Organizing a Screening

a) Potential Venues

- house parties
- local synagogues, Jewish Community Centers, Jewish Federations and other community venues

Site Needs:

Wide screen television or projection screen and DVD player

Seating with a good view for 10 plus people depending on the size of event

b) Staffing the Screening

You will need Brit Tzedek “staffing” to:

- Organize the site, e.g. chairs, literature, technical-set-up
- Make sure equipment is working
- Welcome the guests
- Get sign-ins of all participants
- Distribute literature
- Introduce Brit Tzedek
- Introduce the Film
- Facilitate the Discussion
- Move the Discussion to Action
- Write up report on the event

The facilitators should:

-be active members within the chapter

-be familiar with Brit Tzedek and our message

-be familiar with standard facilitation techniques

Before the event, facilitators and event organizers should meet and view the film together, and thoroughly read through this guide. They can contact Carinne by email Carinne@btvshalom.org or by phone at 212 366 1670 with any questions.

II. Sample Event Schedule

a) Sample introductory notes to the screening

-The five episodes of this documentary were shown on Israeli television. The documentary for the most part received praise in the Israeli news media. The Right has asked Yavin to step down as anchor of the Israeli nightly news. No actions have been taken to remove Yavin as anchor.

-The documentary was filmed in its entirety before the Gaza withdrawal; since then 9000 settlers –both economic and ideological–were evacuated relatively peacefully from Gaza and five small settlements in the West Bank.

-The U.S. based Road Map to peace calls for Israel in phase one to evacuate outposts, and freeze settlement expansion.

b) Suggested questions to follow the screening

It is important to start the group conversation after watching such an information and emotion-packed piece with a moment for people to just say how they feel, without any politics. Give everyone a moment to consider these questions before people respond.

- What are your first reactions to this film?
- What did you enjoy about the film? What did you not enjoy about the film?
- Did you learn anything new during the course of the film?

During the discussion period, you may want to break people up into pairs or groups of 3. This provides people with a bit more privacy and an opportunity to open up without feeling over-exposed. You should, however, provide people with an opportunity to report back to larger group.

Be aware of time – given the opportunity, people are likely to talk for as long as they can. Please point out that you would like to include and involve everyone in the group in the discussion, so everyone should try to limit their own responses to 1-2 minutes.

You can start off with the big questions, the questions about the theme and message (Section I). Then ask the questions about individual themes or sub-themes, moments from the film that are particularly revealing (Section II). Finally, try to ask questions that sum up the documentary and the reactions of the audience (Section III). *Be sure to have copies of these questions printed out so small groups can discuss them as they wish, instead of waiting for the facilitator to read them out.*

Section I tries to draw out the context of the film; it should help you get a sense of how different members of the audience are relating to the film. If you think this section is too general and classroom-like, feel free to skip over it.

Section I

- What are the themes of the documentary?
(i.e. abuse of Palestinian rights; the effects on soldiers; the Left in Israel; the use of religion to provide the basis for settlements etc...)
- What to you is the overall message of this documentary?

Section II

- What does the documentary tell us about who is responsible for the expansion of the settlements? About who is responsible for the behavior of the settlers?
- During the course of the film, the settlers often discuss Israel as a gift from god. What is your reaction to this?
- What is your reaction to the scenes in which the settlers, the Palestinians, and the IDF interact?
- What was your reaction to the interviews with the messianic settlers? Is there any place in which you feel for them? Is there any place in which you can understand them?
- Are you surprised by anything you see in the film?
- Do you think the film presents the complete picture of the settlements and their role in the conflict?

Section III

- What perspectives do you think were included well in the film/? What perspectives would you like to hear more about?
- Why is it so important, given the content of the film, for the American Jewish community to respond and comment on the settlements in Israel?
- Did you see anything that makes you hopeful? Did you see anything that made you think that some settlers would leave?

III. Anticipated Questions and Suggested Answers

Q. The film is unbalanced; it only shows the role of the settlers and does not give adequate attention to the role of the Palestinian extremists, Hamas, terrorists, etc...?

A. The film is intended to highlight the role of the settlements in Israel and in the conflict. Yavin is not suggesting the settlements and the settlers are the only factors causing the conflict, but he is trying to point out their indisputable role.

Yavin says throughout the film, what the settlers are doing is “not Jewish.” Clearly, for him this film is as much about Israel and the country’s own internal morality as much as it is about the conflict itself. It is a film that asks: How are we, as Jews, doing this?

Yavin is also showing us that the settlements, and the inevitable security apparatus/complex that surrounds them, are not merely a response to Israel’s security needs.

Q. Chaim Yavin does not respond when asked about Palestinian terrorism. Doesn’t it show that he, and thus the film, are biased?

A. Perhaps Yavin is incapable of answering questions about Palestinian terrorism in this documentary. He is very much focused here on one thing: settlements. He does not see them as a response to the conflict and to terrorism.

Even if Yavin is biased, the documentary is a portrayal of what is actually happening in the settlements. The pictures have not been manipulated; the stories have not been changed. These are actual interviews and actual footage.

Q. *Land of the Settlers* is not kind to the Left/peace camp either. The Left is, at different times throughout the film, seen as insignificant, argumentative, and even disrespectful.

i) Maybe Israelis disagree with the views of Brit Tzedek, Peace Now etc... and actually support the settlers?

ii) If the Israeli peace camp cannot garner enough support to bring the settlers home to Israel, what can American Jews do?

iii) The settlers are too strong and too determined – they will never return to Israel proper.

A. i) Polls repeatedly show that a majority of Israelis support a negotiated two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and that a majority of Israelis supported the Gaza disengagement. There has been a lot of disappointment in Israel since the Rabin assassination, the end of the Oslo era and the second intifada. Israelis who supported Oslo and actively supported negotiations during Oslo felt betrayed and greatly let down. This inevitably has had an effect on Israelis especially to the extent that they are willing to “stick their neck out” for peace; but the polls show that these Israelis still support an end to the conflict, a negotiated two-state solution, and the creation of a Palestinian state.

ii) It is precisely because the Israeli peace camp is stuck that we need to step in. If Israelis cannot do it, it is our responsibility as American Jews to do what we can to create the momentum for peace. We need to activate the Jewish community in the US so that we can influence and pressure American elected officials to bring the Israeli and Palestinian elected officials together for negotiations.

(iii) In a recent poll, about 30% of settlers in the West Bank have said they would be willing to return to Israel with economic incentives. These settlers, so-called “economic settlers” have formed an organization called One Home to organize and advocate around this position. See attachment: “After Gaza, Some Other Settlers Ready to Move.”

Christian Science Monitor. http://search.csmonitor.com/search_content/0923/p01s03-wome.html

Q. Doesn't this film breed more anti-Israel sentiment?

A. No film can in and of itself breed more anti-Israel sentiment. But the incidents and situation represented in the film will certainly reveal the problems of the Israeli policy of settlements and settlement expansion, and of Israeli treatment of Palestinian civilians. The Gaza disengagement proved that Israel could gain international support for measures taken towards peace; for example, the Pakistani and Israeli foreign ministers held an historic and positive meeting during the first week of September. Only dismantling the settlements, ending the occupation, and bringing negotiations towards a final status agreements can bring about an end to legitimate international opposition to the Israeli government.

After Gaza, some other settlers ready to move

A group in the West Bank wants Israel to start compensation now.

By [Ilene R. Prusher](#)

KARNEI SHOMRON, WEST BANK - In the beginning, it was a small checkpoint. Then it became a well-guarded multilane opening. Soon, it became so jammed that Benny Raz had to wait at least a half-hour to enter Israel proper.

And then, he says, he saw the writing on the wall - and realized he was on the wrong side of it. This settlement, although not far from where internationally recognized Israel ends and the disputed West Bank begins, lies east of Israel's separation barrier, finished here in the past year.

Chances are, Mr. Raz says, such settlements will eventually meet the same fate as the 21 evacuated from Gaza.

The aftermath of the Gaza pullout has changed the Israeli political landscape in more ways than one. By demonstrating the feasible, if difficult, option of dismantling settlements, it has brought the likelihood of further withdrawals out of the realm of the theoretical.

That being the case, Raz wants out - and is spearheading a movement to encourage others to do the same. Their proposal: The government should start offering compensation now to folks like Raz, who came to live here mostly because housing was cheaper - thanks to state incentives - and who are ready to leave of their own accord.

That option could allow people to leave civilly, gradually, privately - in sharp contrast to the national heave-ho that Israel is still smarting from after last month's forced withdrawals.

"I don't want to wait two years so the soldiers will come knock on my door and say, 'OK, let's go, Benny. It's your turn,'" says Raz.

\$3 billion pricetag

A middle-aged man of Jewish-Iraqi descent, Raz was recently dismissed from his job as a local bus driver for his prominent role in the founding of One Home, a new movement aimed at expediting an exodus of settlers back inside the Green Line, Israel's pre-1967 borders.

The movement has attracted a few professors, retired generals, and left-wing politicians, including one who plans to introduce a bill next month in the Knesset, Israel's parliament. It would establish a fund for settlers who have good reason to believe that their homes will eventually go the way of the Gaza settlements.

"Those people who came to settle there didn't come for ideological reasons, and now they're caught in a dilemma. If there won't be a political agreement between Israel and the Palestinians, these settlers will be the first target for the third intifada when it starts," says Avshalom Vilan, a Member of Knesset from the left-wing Yahad Party, speaking by phone.

Vilan's proposal comes with a large price tag: some \$3 billion to move settlers over the next five years and finance the project over 10 years.

But it's a plan that he says will be less costly than having a repeat of the Gaza withdrawal, which Prime Minister Ariel Sharon completed last week when he handed over the evacuated coastal territory to the Palestinian Authority, with its massive costs of temporarily housing evacuees in hotels.

The current disengagement plan is estimated to cost about \$2.5 billion, a bill Israel had hoped it would receive US assistance in paying off.

"The alternative, to wait for an [Israeli-Palestinian] agreement and move the settlers all at once, is more expensive and more traumatic than doing it slowly but surely," says Vilan.

One Home, whose founding members include former senior diplomats, members of the right-wing Likud party, and Dahlia Rabin, daughter of the Israeli prime minister who was assassinated a decade ago this November, says that their polls show that about 30 percent of Jewish settlers in the West Bank would leave immediately if they were offered comparable housing in Israel.

Financially, says Raz, most people have no choice but to stay. The five-bedroom house he bought nearly eight years ago cost \$120,000, and now it's worth only \$40,000. Being stuck here, he says, makes him feel like "cannon fodder."

While the Israeli government says that Palestinians now have to take steps toward fighting terrorism for any further progress to occur, many Palestinians think Israel's withdrawal from Gaza means that militancy works. The last "legitimate" target, Raz fears, will be people like him.

"I don't want to be hostage to that," he says. "The world says the settlers are stopping peace. So OK, come and help us leave."

Although it is difficult to confirm numbers, few are outspoken about sharing Raz's outlook. Most people here, particularly local leaders, hold to a more traditional line which opposes any withdrawals and views the West Bank as Israel's divinely endowed heartland.

"Benny is a minority of a minority of a minority. Only a handful of twisted people think like him," says Lilian Zeitman, the spokeswoman of Karnei Shomron. "He doesn't really represent anyone but himself and maybe 10 other friends." She says more than 90 percent of settlers here have no interest in leaving and are sure they will remain a part of Israel.

Indeed, the lessons learned from disengagement are summed up very differently by those who hope that the scope of the Gaza withdrawal will never be repeated in the West Bank. To Sondra Oster Baras, for example, who has been living here for 18 years, disengagement was a mistake that "gave a reward to terrorism." To her, proposing a law that would encourage settlers to move is nonsensical.

"I think it's extremely dangerous for people to be putting forward, before we even get to negotiations, that we're ready to give up half the country," says Mrs. Oster Baras, an Ohio native and mother of five. She continues to wear the orange bracelet that symbolizes opposition to disengagement, and says that the community is growing: There's still demand for homes here.

Moreover, she points out, the government is considering plans to move the line of the separation barrier to include this and other area settlements. A Supreme Court ruling here last week made clear only that the barrier's placement was still a matter of dispute, and that it would have to take Palestinian access into consideration.

But like many of the more ideological settlers, Oster-Baras opposes the wall altogether because of the inherent message sent by its architects: Israel will eventually give up control over large swaths - if not most - of the West Bank.

Risky endeavor

Over a cold drink in the small-town shopping plaza here, Raz sits near the shuttered falafel shop that was run by his wife until two months ago. He convinced his wife to close it because he knew that doing business would become intolerable when he went public with his views.

Some of his fellow residents yelled "shame" or spat on the ground when he walked by, some simply started to ignore him. A local rabbi, he says, placed him in "herem" - an antiquated Jewish practice that demands the wayward person be completely ignored, a step short of being excommunicated.

While some sneer or roll their eyes at the sight of him speaking to a reporter in the pizza shop, others come over to offer friendly hellos.

One woman, a cook and mother of four, came here after she got divorced because it was the only place she could afford to raise her children in a house with a garden instead of in a tiny apartment. "There's a great quality of life here," says Leah Livni, "but I'm living on borrowed time."

Raz says he isn't frightened by the community's reactions to his activism: He's received threatening phone calls and jeers, in addition to his recent pink slip. What worries him more is the thought of being yanked out of his home the way the Gaza settlers were - or being stuck on the front lines of the next intifada.

"It was hard to see what happened in Gaza," he says. "and that's why I don't want to get to the same stage."

He also says that living here in recent years, he's begun to have more empathy for what Palestinians go through. For every time he was forced to sit at his local checkpoint for 20 minutes, he says, he was dismayed to see Palestinians waiting at the checkpoint for two hours. "When you open your eyes," he says, "you say, these people are more or less just like me."

Appendix III: Setting up Listening Projects: A Program from Brit Tzedek's Inclusivity Initiative

There are many Jews whose views are quite close to the positions of Brit Tzedek. They are members of synagogues; they are active in many different kinds of Jewish community organizations; they are involved in Jewish youth groups. Some of them have been afraid to speak openly about their concerns or criticisms of the policies of the current Israeli government because they are afraid of being labeled self-hating or traitorous to Israel. Others are worried that there is not a parallel agenda of peace in the Palestinian community and thus no partner in the pursuit of a negotiated resolution.

Some of these people will be won over to Brit Tzedek by simply hearing about our organization and attending our programs. But, there are many Jews who may first need a safe place to be listened to where they can share their worries and fears about Israel.

Therefore, we encourage Brit Tzedek chapters to initiate 'listening projects' in synagogues and Jewish organizations.

The goal of the listening project is to create safe places for Jews to be listened to. We want to break the fear of dissent that has become the norm in the Jewish community when talking about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and encourage dialogue, discussion, and a diversity of views.

There are a variety of different models for conducting listening projects. For use by Brit Tzedek activists in the Jewish community, we encourage you to use the model below. Of course, we welcome your feedback and comments based on your own experiences. Please let us know: What worked? What might be improved? Eventually, Brit Tzedek would like to join with each chapter to launch these listening projects. We can also offer a mentor to every chapter that wants to organize a listening project to walk you through the model and to answer any questions you have about how to set-up, advertise, and organize this program.

Model for A Listening Project

Size: Ideally, you want your group to consist of 15-30 people
You can divide larger groups into groups of 12 and assign Brit Tzedek members to facilitate each group. It is recommended to have two facilitators for each group, so no one has to lead a group in isolation.

I. Introductory Exercise (5 minutes)

Instructions: Ask each person to say their name and something they are proud of---or that they like about Israel.

Rationale: Saying something positive about Israel first will help people start out remembering what they like about Israel first before they talk about the struggles. This will also establish from the beginning that Brit Tzedek is an organization that has a positive commitment to Israel and to its well-being.

II. Learning similarities and differences about each other and building unity (20 minutes)

Instructions:

A. The facilitator mentions a number of different groups and people are invited to stand if they belong to that group while others applaud. Note: encourage people to really “hoot n’ holler” – this exercise is meant to be fun.

B. Groups to mention could include:

Raised Reform,
Raised Conservative
Raised Orthodox
Raised Reconstructionist
Raised Secular/ Humanist
Raised Zionist
Raised Not Jewish
Jewish by Choice
Visited Israel
Lived in Israel
Born in Israel
Reads a lot about Israel
Has trouble reading about Israel at all

C. Follow up by asking if there are other things people would love to know about each other.

Rationale: This portion adds a lot of spirit, or *ruach*, to the event. It is a way of acknowledging our diversity as Jews and welcoming each other, while encouraging a safe space for all to talk and identify themselves. This activity loosens up the group and reminds them that they all have something in common with another person in the room. This makes the later sharing richer and easier.

III. Pair Activities (20 minutes for each activity)

Instructions:

- A. Ask the group to divide into pairs in order to talk and listen to each other. Each person gets a few minutes to talk with their partner listening.
- B. In explaining this activity, please make a point of asking participants to, if possible, try not to interrupt each other with lots of questions or comments
- C. One person speaks for 2 minutes while the other person listens. Then the roles are reversed. The facilitator keeps time to announce when it is time to stop and switch roles.
- D. After each question in this exercise – when each person has had a chance to talk and to be listened to in their pairs – the facilitator welcomes everyone back to the group and asks: Who would like to share with the larger group what they had talked about in their pair? And just give folks a chance to be listened to in the large group--one at a time, getting a chance to speak.
- E. The facilitator then asks each person to choose a different partner, before moving on to the next question.
- F. It is possible to adapt the proposed questions below to suit the needs of your audience.

Rationale

When we as Jews talk about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict with those who disagree with us, there is tendency to feel as though we are not being heard. At the same time, there is a tendency not to listen to the other person. Having people get a chance to both speak and then be listened to first in a pair means that everyone has had a chance to be heard and help creates safety for people to share later in the larger group.

Proposed Questions for Part III

- A. *What is your earliest memory of learning or hearing anything about people of Arab heritage or Palestinians?*

Rationale: This question has been a useful one in many Jewish groups because it can help people realize that much of what they learned early on about people of Arab heritage is stereotypical, without imposing moral judgments or corrections on their memories. It also helps Jews to realize the backdrop against which they may be thinking about Palestinians in the present period.

- B. *What worries you or concerns you deeply about the current situation in Israel?*

Rationale: This open-ended question invites the discussion and airing of personal fears and concerns without judgment. The goal is to give people a chance to talk openly without having to simply repeat political positions. It encourages people to speak more from their hearts.

C. What gives you hope about the future of Israel? What gives you hope that the current situation in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict can and will improve?

Rationale: This question allows us to talk about our vision for the future and understand why we are all in this room. The goal is to give people a chance to share stories of joy or hope or inspiration.

D. What is something you personally can do to take action against the feelings of helplessness or powerlessness in the Israeli Palestinian conflict?

Rationale: We want the session to end with people having a sense that they can do something to change the current situation in Israel. We also want to assist them to think what actions they can personally take---including joining with Brit Tzedek.

If you are addressing an audience unfamiliar or uninvolved with Brit Tzedek, this can be a useful moment to present Brit Tzedek as an organization that offers a hopeful message about something Jews can do with the concerns they have about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

WHAT TO DO IF PEOPLE START ARGUING WITH EACH OTHER:

Most importantly--you don't want to attack the person or tell them why what they are saying is wrong. As calmly as you can--simply remind everyone that the purpose of this gathering is to try and listen to each other--and not to argue. It is also helpful to acknowledge how hard that can be sometimes on a topic such as the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in which we as Jews are so emotionally invested. It is vital to listen to others, especially those with whom you may disagree.

AN ALTERNATIVE MODEL

If you are working with a smaller group---6-8 people, you might decide to keep everyone together instead of breaking up into pairs to answer each question. In this case, you would simply go around the circle and have each person answer each question therefore giving everyone a chance to hear each other. Here the facilitator must institute and enforce strict ground rules to ensure that everyone speaks for the same amount of time and listen thoughtfully to each other without comment or criticism about what they hear.