



“Upon three things the world is based:  
Torah, worship, and acts of kindness”  
Ethics of the Fathers 1:2

“All Jews are responsible for each other”  
Talmud

# “That’s as Jewish as you can get” (Isaac)

“ I still sort of identify to some extent with the events [at Massada]. This was an anti-imperial struggle, the Roman Empire trying to take over this area, and these were people who resisted it. And I think this, to some extent, is consistent with what I’m doing right now.

I think there’s a struggle going on over what it means to be Jewish. For me, rebuilding a house together with people that are supposed to be my enemy, who are facing terrible injustices at the hands of a powerful state – that’s as Jewish as you can get. ”

- Isaac draws on a specific definition of what Jewish action might be: helping the oppressed, no matter their creed or group. Is this, for you, as Jewish as you can get? Are there other values that your understanding of Jewish morality includes?
- Does concern for other Jews – simply because they are Jews – fit into your approach to Judaism, or does it contradict?
- Is your concern for other Jews conditional upon their behavior? Or is it unconditional?



# I’m scared. Simple as that. (Gregg)

**Fact:**  
two-thirds of North American Jewry have never been to Israel.

▪ What are the three main reasons that keep you from visiting Israel more often than you do?

“ We touched down, and I said, well, I’m in Israel now. And walking through just the crummy little passageway from the airplane to the terminal, and I was touching this – whatever it is – fiberglass, I don’t know – and this is Israel. Now I’m here.

- Have you ever felt an anti-climax on arriving in Israel?
- When you visit Israel what are your concerns on arrival? What are the concerns of your family?

I’m freaking out. I’m glad I’m here, like I said when I landed, I’m looking forward to doing all the stuff... but I’m scared. Simple as that. ”

- What advice or support might you have offered to Gregg in Tel Aviv during the war, as he contemplated staying or leaving?
- Che Guevara once said: “Solidarity means being willing to take the same risks.” Do you agree with this?
- And if not, how would you define ‘solidarity’? What value does it have?
- Has anyone ever shown solidarity to you?





## "The journey from powerlessness to power" (Ruth)

“I’ve begun to question the need for a strong army, the sense of militarism which typically is not how I approach life...”

- Does the use of force strike you as ‘un-Jewish’?
- Remembering Joshua, Samson, and King David, do you think that the Israeli army represents a return to a Jewish way of life? Or does it represent a rupture from the traditional Jewish search for peace?



“Inescapably, Jewish hands become dirtied with blood and guilt as they operate in the real world. The classic Jewish self-image – the innocent, sinned-against sufferer whose moral superiority sustained self-respect – is being tested and eroded. Ethical muscles not flexed for centuries are now used; sometimes they are stiff and sore... Diaspora Jews who still live with the ideals and illusions of powerlessness are often embarrassed by this phenomenon. Yet... an ethic of power incorporates the value of creating an army... The prayer of the powerful is different from that of the powerless. The prayer of the powerful is more properly focused on self-judgment. We ask God not to save us from our fate but to strengthen our good tendencies and accompany us as Friend, Partner, and Judge in our use of power...”

*The Jewish Way* Rabbi Irving Greenberg

I’ve been racking my brains for the last few days and saying ‘How do you get peace? How do you live comfortably in an area which does not want you?’ ”

- How high would you rate comfort as a value in life?
- Do you believe that the state of war that Israel faces is due to her behavior, or due to her being there?



## I’m very dedicated... (Nehanni)

“We just went to get tear-gassed, and now we’re buying bread! And now it’s time for Shabbat...!”

- What do you think lies behind Nahanni’s response to the craziness of flipping from demonstration to Shabbat bread-buying? Sadness? Frustration? Resignation? Exhilaration? Insanity? Survival?
- Do you think she is enjoying herself?
- Can you identify with this?

“

Now I think my relationship to Israel is very complicated, and very deep, and very... I mean I’m very dedicated to what happens here.

- Nahanni uses a very specific word to describe her relationship to Israel: “dedicated”. How do you think this differs from “interested”, or “concerned”, or “showing solidarity”?
- To what in your life would you say that you are “dedicated”?
- What word would you use to define your relationship to Israel?







## I was surprised to hear myself say that ... (Caryn)

“Look, I’m troubled. I’m troubled by the Zionist project as it is put into practice in the past 50 years... As an American who values civil rights, human rights, and the idea of civil liberties, and the idea of justice, I see that there’s a lot of injustice here... I think Jews would be okay, if there were no Israel... I had this thought walking down Derech Bet Lechem that... I love it here! And I was surprised to hear myself say that. I really love it here...”



- Caryn Aviv is critical of Israel’s actions, yet at the same time surprises herself by admitting how much she also loves the place. To what extent do you identify with this seeming contradiction?
- Do you also find it easier to explain your critique of Israel than to express your love for the place?
- Or conversely do you find it very difficult to critique Israel for fear of contradicting your deep love?

“For too long this historic relationship [between US Jewry and Israel] might be characterized as ‘hugging’. From the Diaspora we have become used to hugging Israel. We give Israel warmth, love, and support – with our eyes closed. The hugging has served both sides well. It has allowed Israelis to play baby, waiting to be fed by rich Americans; and it has allowed Americans to avoid facing the fact that their baby has now grown up... We are now in need of new paradigms, new ways of understanding our relationship between Israel and the Diaspora. Hugging alone is not enough. We need to add ‘wrestling’ to our hugging. Just as its biblical echoes suggest, wrestling with Israel requires an effort, a fight, a struggle. But it also demands an intimacy and a commitment.”

Robbie Gringras, MAKOM 2006



(Peter)

“To call yourself a Jew and not have an interest in the religion - I don’t quite understand - but I certainly understand it better from being here. How one could feel closer to the racial-ethnic sense of one’s roots... When people on the tour bus say “Our ancestors - I don’t know about that - I feel a little squeamish...”



(Marni)

Whether or not you are thrilled about your identity – being Jewish or practising Judaism – other people define you that way. Whether or not you choose to or not, that’s how you will be defined... And the same thing with Israel. You’re Jewish and people will associate you with Israel whether or not you’ve ever gone there, whether or not you have any relationship to it. And I feel that if I’m going to be associated with a place, I actually want to have my own relationship with it that I define.



(R. Leib)

Davening at that first minyan in the morning (at the Kotel), is very inspirational. There’s a tremendous feeling of connectedness a feeling of relating to something that I have difficulty reaching all year long in Brooklyn... it gives me some kind of uplift for the entire year... This is where we are supposed to be...”

## What’s the connection?

We might sum up these three people’s approaches like this:

1. Peter sees that Jews are connected to each other and to Israel through shared values, not shared ethnicity. Talk of ethnic connections make him uncomfortable. He looks for a *Brit Ye’ud* – a covenant of destiny – to bind Jews to one another.

2. Marni suggests our relationship to Israel is a covenant of fate – *Brit Goral* – something we are ‘born into’, whether we like it or not. For her, the relationship is a given: our choice is about the attitude we choose to apply to this situation.

3. Leib feels that his relationship to Israel is inspirational, divine, immanent.

- To what extent do you agree with all three of them?
- To what extent to you disagree with all of them?

Another way of summing up these three approaches might be to give voice to what is **not** being said:

1 – if Israel is full of people who don’t care about the religion, then I don’t understand why I should have anything to do with the place...

2 – Israel is a complete pain that always gets shoved in my face. That is the only reason I feel I need to contend with it...

3 – Israel is just my spiritual gas station. I only go there to fill up...

- To what extent do you identify with these comments?



# Introduction

This guide follows two key principles:

## 1. Focus on the people

A broad-ranging discussion about 'Israel' and issues surrounding Israel risks inviting speeches, prepared comments, and the airing of much-rehearsed opinions. Like the film, we suggest focussing on the people, the characters of the film, and basing exploration on them.

## 2. Listen to what is not being said

Just as important as what the characters say, is what they do not say. In this sense, we might say that the characters in the film are symbolic of the Jewish communal discourse about Israel. Too often we feel 'Israel conversations' are skirting around the deeper issues. This guide attempts to draw the participants' discourse under the surface.

**Alternate formats:**

### The meal following the film

For a public screening of the movie that requires a somewhat informal yet structured post-show discussion, we highly recommend a film+meal format. At the meal immediately following the screening, you can make use of the discussion place mats that are available for free download from our site. We suggest making sure that each table has all six different place mats. When people sit down to their meal, with the movie still rolling in their thoughts, their table will be (literally) full of leading questions to talk over.

### The extracts screening

If the discussion following the film cannot take place on the same day, or if you do not have enough time to screen the entire film, we suggest you make use of the extracts DVD. This DVD has been specially prepared with only the contributions of the people who feature in the discussion guides. You can distribute the place mats, or you can make use of the facilitator's guide.

### Notes to the facilitator

If you are going to facilitate the discussion, here are a few suggestions:

- It may be useful first asking how many people have been to Israel, and how many times.
- Allow about 10 to 15 minutes for a general non-focussed de-briefing on people's feelings about the film. Examples: How did the film leave you feeling? Which character did you most identify with? If you had only one word to sum up your response to the movie, what would it be?/one word to sum up your relationship with Israel?  
After this debriefing, move to the questions in the guide. Feel free to use all or some or none of the questions. As far as we are concerned, they all raise issues that could be argued over for years, so don't worry if you spend more time on some issues than others.
- Don't push for the answer you would like to hear. But do push for comments that you judge are authentic, and intelligible to all.
- Try to keep people focussed on the questions. Too often talking about Israel draws people in to general pontification! The questions are designed to push the participants a little further, and a little more personal.





בעיניים פקוחות  
**eyes wide open**

American Jews See Israel

A Film by Paula Weiman-Kelman  
Produced by Jonathan Lopatin

Edited by Hila Waldman

Written by Stuart Schoffman

Original Score by Shaul Besser

USA/Israel 2008, 60 min.

For more than a year Paula Weiman-Kelman followed a wide range of American Jews, first-timers and frequent visitors, on their journeys to Israel. The result is Eyes Wide Open – a warm and personal film that vividly conveys joys and ambivalences. Shot in Israel and the U.S., in synagogues and airports, at ancient landmarks and modern war zones, the film captures the spontaneous reactions of its ensemble of characters. The visitors represent a spectrum of American Jewry: Orthodox, traditional and secular, male and female, young and old, liberal and conservative. What emerges is an honest and moving collective portrait, graced with visual beauty and spiced with humor.

Stephanie & Ruti Design



[www.eyeswideopenisrael.org](http://www.eyeswideopenisrael.org)  
not so simple productions

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Once You Visit Israel, Everything Looks Different

בעיניים  
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