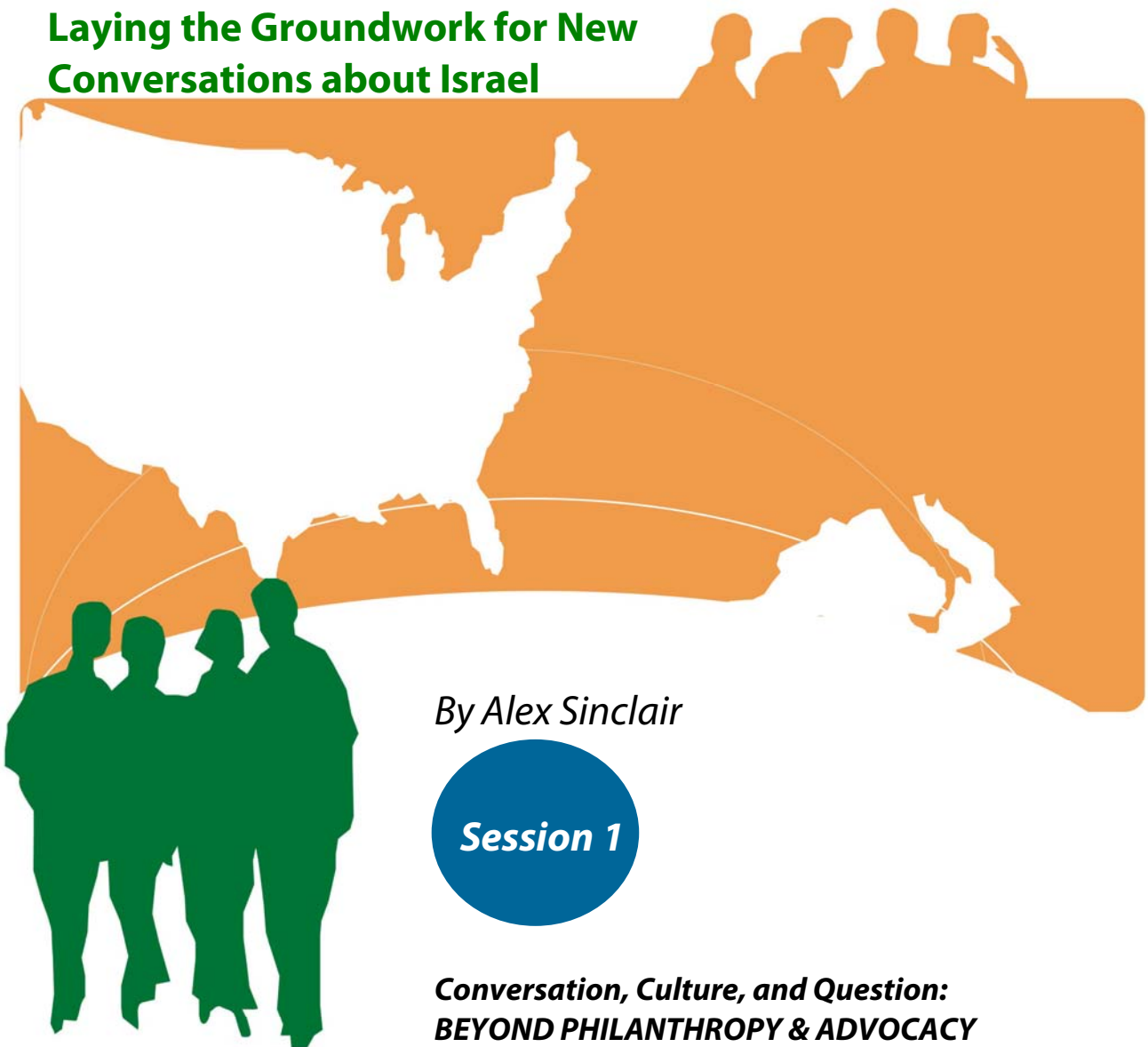# makōm מָקוֹם

Israel. In Real Life

Real Talk:

Laying the Groundwork for New Conversations about Israel

By Alex Sinclair

Session 1

Conversation, Culture, and Question:
BEYOND PHILANTHROPY & ADVOCACY
Towards a New Paradigm of Israel Engagement

Leader's Guide

What is this guide and who is it for?

This guide is a resource for facilitators working with a group of Jewish leaders, in order to help them think differently about *how* Israel engagement happens in their particular context. It will be appropriate for use with a wide variety of audiences and settings, including, but not solely: lay leaders of Federation committees or Synagogue boards with Israel remits; day school faculty who want to think about the place of Israel in their curriculum; groups of rabbis coming together for in-service professional development study; or even student activists who want to revitalize their Hillel. While not a curriculum *per se*, it offers a narrative description of how these sessions were successfully run by one particular individual. From this record or documentation, it is hoped that the reader will be able to internalize the ideas and methods of the unit, and adopt or adapt them as needed for his or her own context. The guide can be followed rigorously and exactly, to try to recreate the precise moves described, or it can be used more as a resource or idea base which can be massaged, customized, and added to for different contexts, as appropriate.

Why do we need to Change the Way we do Israel Engagement?

Many Jews, especially those who have not visited Israel, are caught between the Scylla of negativity and the Charybdis of myth. The Scylla is the plethora of negative received images about Israel that the average Jew sees and hears every day: Israel is perceived as a place that is extremely dangerous; at constant war; responsible for aggressive actions against the Palestinians that are difficult if not impossible to understand; a place with a severe poverty problem; a country whose inhabitants live in personal situations that are to be pitied. On the other hand, the Charybdis - the mythic view of Israel that certain elements of the Jewish community seek, consciously or not, to perpetuate - perceives Israel as a heroic nation; a Davey Crocket fighting off the Mexicans; with the strongest army in the world; a place of incredible high-tech achievements and intellectual brilliance; a place where oranges grow in the desert and Microsoft turns to for its best ideas.

Both of these perspectives, of course, contain elements of truth, but are, for the most part, quite distorted pictures of a more complex and nuanced reality. But from an educational perspective, lack of "accuracy" is just one problem. Perhaps even more worrisome is the fact that these images of Israel have extremely problematic educational implications. Firstly, the overload of negative images creates enormous barriers that Israel educators have to overcome. Who would want to visit a war-torn, poverty-stricken place like that? Who would want to have a relationship with it? You might feel sorry for it, but would you want to "engage" with it? Secondly, the "antidote," while an important component of Zionist identity for a certain older generation, is often seen as suspect by many young Jews. Who can blame them? If highly respected media outlets tell you one thing, and the local Jewish paper tells you another, who are you likely to believe? Thirdly, the Jewish community itself is caught in a confused tension with its messages. On the one hand we want to raise money for Israel, and

makōm מקום
Israel. In Real Life

it's perhaps easiest to do so by peddling the "poverty" image. On the other hand, we also want to attract our best and brightest young people to visit Israel and engage with it, so we also send out the "Microsoft" messages. Mixed messages such as these are not conducive to educational success.

The Challenge

How, then, do we get Jewish leaders of all varieties to think differently about Israel engagement? How do we break ourselves out of our old paradigms and expose ourselves to the new ideas about Israel engagement with which MAKOM seeks to imbue the world Jewish community? And how do we do this quickly and efficiently, both respecting our audience's past and present service to the Jewish community, and also inspiring them to re-envision what their future service might look like?

This mini-curriculum of three sessions is a response to these difficult and complex challenges. These sessions were held (in a slightly different format) with a group of lay leaders from the Jewish Federation of Metrowest New Jersey in fall-winter 2005-6, and with a group of synagogue lay leaders, also from the Metrowest area, in fall-winter 2006-7.

The central educational and political challenge in running such sessions is that, by definition, these will usually focus critically on the kinds of ideas and modes of action that the participants have been creating, working in, and committed to, for several years. However, one cannot simply walk in and say, "What you have been doing until now is wrong". Rather, the educational challenge is to create stimuli that will lead to the participants arriving at certain realizations on their own. Only then will they truly buy into the MAKOM vision - because only then will it truly be theirs.

John Dewey, in *The Child and The Curriculum*, wrote that education is not about letting the learners do whatever they want, nor about merely presenting learners with facts as a "hieroglyphs". Rather, it is about starting with the learners and finding ways to have them move themselves to the established ideas of the curriculum. That is precisely the challenge in these three sessions.

Note to the Facilitator:

In what follows, I will attempt to walk you through the sessions as I ran them. Again, please note that this is not a curriculum, but a narrative description of what I did, and what my goals were in doing it. Much of what you will read below consists of my own idiosyncrasies and teaching "*shtick*," which is unique to me and no better or worse than your own tried and trusted methods and styles. The aim is not to have you copy me; it's to give you a sense of what I did, in the hope that you will be able to adapt it as necessary for your own personal style. Handouts referred to in the text below can be found in the Appendix at the end of this leader's guide.

makōm מקוֹם
Israel. In Real Life

Overview of Session

1. Guests-R-Us (10 mins)

2. Israel Word Association (10 mins)

3. Three Photos as Paradigms of Israel Engagement (30 mins)

4. Returning to Guests-R-Us (20 mins)

5. Conversation as a Metaphor for Israel Engagement (20 mins)

Part 1: Guests-R-Us (10 mins)

The beginning activity of this session is the "Guests-R-Us" coupons. [Note that you may wish to change the names of the four choices to suit your particular audience, but see my explanation later on in order to make sure that you keep the right four stereotypes]. Before I actually hand out the cards, I usually present what I am doing as follows: "I don't get paid so much by [insert name of your employer here], so I'm trying to supplement my income with this little business. You know, I was thinking, why do I keep having dinner parties with the same old people? Wouldn't it be nice to expand my guest list a little? And that's when I came up with this idea." At this point, hand out the cards and continue: "Since you seem like nice people, I thought I would give you all this coupon as a way of introducing you to my business, and hopefully if you like it, you'll tell your friends and I'll get some good publicity. So please, take a few minutes now, and place a check by your guest of choice, and give me back the coupons." Someone will probably remark that Mother Theresa is dead. "Ah-hah!", you reply: "At Guests-R-Us we go the extra mile for our clients. Even *t'chiyat hameitim*!"

Obviously, you need to present this opening gambit with your tongue slightly in your cheek, but with enough seriousness to a) pique the participants' interest; b) make sure that each participant does in fact check off one option and give you back the coupon; and c) set out your credentials as a charismatic, amusing, and interesting speaker (since this is probably the first time they will have encountered you).

In educational parlance, this is a set induction or "grabber".

Once you have collected all the coupons, put them to one side, and move on. Your audience will be expecting you to reveal "what it's really about", but you will delay their gratification and return to the coupons later on in the session. You may wish to "almost" go back to them at one or two points during the presentation, in order to keep them in the participants' minds. In other words, your task is to ensure that the audience intuits that Guests-R-Us will come back into play during the session, and you can "tease" them a little about when exactly that will happen. But other than these teases, which can be as short and simple as picking up the pile of coupons, looking through them, and putting them back down again, you should immediately move on to part 2 once you have collected them.

makōm מקום
Israel. In Real Life

Part 2: Israel Word Association (10 mins)

The purpose of this section is to lay the groundwork for the participants to problematize the existing paradigms on their own, without you having to tell them. I have used the following activity several times with different audiences, and it has always worked like a dream, but it is slightly risky. For it to succeed, your audience needs to be a self-selecting group of overtly affiliated Jews who have serious connections to Israel; most audiences of Federation lay-leaders easily answer this description.

Write the word "Israel" on a big sheet of flip chart paper, or on a whiteboard, or similar. Say the following to the participants:

"We are going to play Israel word association. Now, you are all highly affiliated, knowledgeable, committed, Zionist Jews, who know a lot about Israel. But I am asking you to put yourselves inside the heads of the average Jew: think about friends or acquaintances who are less committed than yourselves, who have not visited Israel, who don't have your base of knowledge. I want you to role-play these average Jews. Now, let's play word association: "*What words or phrases or images or ideas come into your head when I say the word 'Israel'?*"

Clearly, you are stacking the decks here; you are deliberately talking up your audience, massaging their ego a little, and inviting them to differentiate themselves from the "average Jew". It's a little Machiavellian, but it has always worked for me.
Your audience will probably come up with words like: *terror, war, conflict, wall (Western, separation, or both), poverty, fear, bombs*. Perhaps you'll get: *oppression, Palestinians, etc.* Perhaps you'll get words like: *holy, or beaches, or desert*. If you don't get words like *terror* and *poverty* and *crisis*, then you may need to prompt for them by saying: "Remember, we're talking about the average Jew, who has never visited Israel, doesn't know what you know".

OK. Now you have this big list of rather horrible words. The next step is to say as follows:
"Now, I want you to step back into your own minds. You, the lay leaders of the X Federation, who know Israel, who have visited Israel, who perhaps have friends in Israel, who have deeper knowledge about Israel. I want to start a new list of *your* word associations."

Of course, this is manipulative, but you will very likely get a very different list of words. It may include things like: *science, arts, home, friends, family, architecture, spirituality, hiking, beach, identity*. If the list seems entirely "positive", it's important that you prompt as follows: "Come on, I don't believe that you all think Israel is perfect. What words jump into your minds that relate to some of the beautiful complexities, difficulties, and frustrations of Israel?" Hopefully you'll get words or phrases like: *rude taxi drivers, orthodox bias, noisy, political instability*, and so on, and you may well also get *some* repetition from the first list.

makōm מקום
Israel. In Real Life

While manipulative, the setting up of two extremes or polarities, in order to learn from the tension they present, is an age-old rhetorical technique. In setting up these extremes you are following in an educational tradition that goes back to Socrates; in the modern age, John Dewey was extremely fond of using dichotomy to make a point. Does that make you feel any better? At some point you may wish to "apologize" for this manipulation, but only do so when the audience has really understood and bought into your end point.

You should now have two lists side by side on the board or on two flip chart pages, which you should tear off and post on the wall. These lists should look very different. Take a step back - go and stand among the participants, and point to the lists. "Here is the problem", you should say. "These two lists are the problem. Why do *you* all think of these things when you hear the word Israel – things which are interesting, beautiful, meaningful, powerful, and complex – not all rose-colored spectacles, because there are also words up there that are difficult and frustrating and perplexing – but the average Jew thinks of very different kinds of words? These two lists are the problem".

Hopefully, by now you have in part 1 piqued the participants' interest, and in part 2 begun to get them thinking afresh about Israel engagement in the American Jewish community. In part 3, you will make a frontal presentation that will concretize this new thinking.

Part 3: Three Photos as Paradigms of Israel Engagement (30 mins)

Give out the handout. Explain to the participants that the handout begins with a series of three photos that represent three different prisms through which the Jewish community often views Israel.

(i) Photo 1 (New York Times).
This photo came out in September 2000, soon after the outbreak of the "Al-Aqsa Intifada". Some of your participants may know the story behind it. If one of them wants to tell it, let them. Otherwise, you can tell them that the kid in the picture is not a Palestinian but rather an American Jewish kid by the name of Tuvia Grossman. Grossman's family lives in Chicago and he was in Israel for the year after a high school at yeshivah. Grossman had been attacked by a group of Palestinians and the Border Guard policeman in the photo was waving them away – probably saving his life in the process. In addition, the photo was clearly not taken at the Temple Mount, as the Gas Station logo in the background attests! (For more information on this story, see http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tuvia_Grossman).

What is important to bear in mind in relation to this photo is *not* its factual veracity or lack thereof, nor questions of media bias, anti-Semitism, and so on. What is crucial is to understand is that the average Jew is bombarded with images like this - day in, day out, week in, week out. The educational or identity-related outcomes of these images are clear, and lead precisely to the kinds of word associations that we saw previously. *It's really, really important to stress that your concern is not media bias.* I often say that organizations like CAMERA and Honest Reporting, while perhaps necessary, "do a dirty job and one that I wouldn't want to

makōm מקום
Israel. In Real Life

do". The issue that you need to stress is what effects images of Israel from the media have on Jewish identity and education. Regardless of factual accuracy, the average Jewish consumer of world media gets hit by these kinds of images the whole time: images of Israel as: a violent aggressor; an oppressor of Palestinians; a terrible violator of human rights. No wonder they have negative images of Israel.

These kinds of images are hardly conducive to an attractive perception of Israel as a country. If one of our main goals in Israel engagement is to get Jews to visit Israel, photos and images like this are unlikely to help us achieve it. It puts Israel somewhere alongside Iraq and Afghanistan, in terms of likely tourist destinations for the world's Jews.

You should now introduce photo 2; before you do so, you should point out that while one can blame the New York Times and other media outlets for the kind of negative images that photo 1 represents, we are about to examine a photo which demonstrates that we, the Jewish community, are *complicit* in this image-making.

(ii) Photo 2 (Israel Emergency Campaign).
This image was copied and pasted directly from the United Jewish Communities' website in the summer of 2006, during the Israel Emergency Campaign that "responded" to the Second Lebanon War.
This image, and others like it, were everywhere during that campaign. Again, you should stress that you are not so much interested in the factual accuracy or inaccuracy of the image as the effects it has on the identity of the consumer. You can remind the participants of the first list of words on the flipchart and note that it is no wonder Jews have negative images of Israel when we, the organized Jewish community, shower them with photos such as this. You might want to note that a senior member of the professional staff of the UJA-Federation of New York apparently said in private that this campaign "set us back 10 years" – by which he or she meant that even if it succeeded in raising money, it had disastrous effects on our educational agenda. Again, think of the goal of Israel Travel alongside this image. *How likely is the average Jew to wish to visit or engage deeply with Israel when this is the image that comes into their mind?*

(iii) Photo 3 (Mitzvah project)
This third photo was taken by me at a suburban synagogue in the Metrowest area. The photo is of a very large placard placed at the entrance to the sanctuary telling guests of the bar-mitzvah boy's "mitzvah project". [I took the picture on the Wednesday before the Shabbat of the bar mitzvah]. Again, stress that you are not interested in the accuracy or inaccuracy of the claim made by the Bar-Mitzvah boy.
What is important to note is that this kind of message is also quite ubiquitous throughout the world Jewish community. Israel in this photo is perceived as a terribly poor country, of third world standards, where kids – "most" kids – can't even afford pencils and paper. Again, why would anyone want to visit such a place?
And certainly when we now put all three photos together, we get a picture of a country that is desperately poor, is in a constant state of war and violence, leaving its inhabitants in terrible crisis and anguish, and is also doing terrible things to Palestinians all the time.
It's not that there is no truth whatsoever in these ideas – of course, there are pockets of deep poverty in Israel; there are communities and individuals for whom terrorism has created

makōm מקום
Israel. In Real Life

terrible personal tragedies; both acute and ongoing; and - without getting into politics - there are certainly Israelis who feel that Israel as a country has not treated its Palestinian neighbors correctly. But, taken together, these images, and the scores of other ones like them that world Jewry are exposed to, present an powerful, overall image of Israel that is absurd, one-dimensional, and - from an educational perspective - incredibly counter-productive.

Part 4: Returning to Guests-R-Us (20 minutes)

Now is the time to return to the coupons. You should quickly sort and count them. Every time I have done this, Barack Obama gets by far the most votes; Mother Theresa gets 2 or 3, so does the homeless guy, and there is often someone who picks Pat Robertson, "because it would be a lively discussion". But basically, Obama wins. If for some reason your group does not pick Obama by a clear majority, you should express shock and surprise and simply state that every other time this exercise has been done, Barack Obama was chosen.

The question is: Why?

Each of the other three dinner guest choices connects with the photos and images we have previously discussed.

Pat Robertson is (in the opinion of some people, at least) a right-wing bigot with disgraceful political and religious views. If he was a member of your family, you would be embarrassed and ashamed, and probably try not to mention it to others. Of course, if someone threatened to kill him, you would stand up for him and for his right to live in peace, but in general you would do so only out of some kind of recognition of common humanity. Once his life had been saved and he reverted to his usual views and rants, you would steer clear of him and wouldn't want to have anything much to do with him! You probably wouldn't want to have him over for dinner with your friends - you'd be mortified! Israel as Pat Robertson is unlikely to induce Jews to seek meaningful, dialogical, engaging relationships with it.
The connection to photo number one should be clear.

The homeless guy from across the street is clearly analogous to the Israel of poverty. Yes, you feel sorry for the homeless guy; yes, you might give him some money; yes, you shake your head and tut-tut and say isn't it terrible - but would you really want to have him over for dinner? In the same way, when we present Israel as poverty-stricken, we are, again, unlikely to induce Jews to seek meaningful, dialogical, engaging relationships with it.

Finally, Mother Theresa. Mother Theresa represents an image of Israel that is often used as something of an "antidote" to these other images. You can direct the participants' attention to the next page of the handout - the good news about Israel section. Don't study this page in detail, but just read out a couple of bullet points and give the participants a sense of what it is about. (Many of the participants will have received this in their email inboxes, with almost as much regularity as the Viagra adverts and the letters from that nice fellow in Nigeria who wants to give me a million dollars). Mother Theresa is a saint – literally! She is a vision of

makōm מקום
Israel. In Real Life

perfection, the zenith of human character and morality. She has no faults. She is untouchable. As such, she would probably make a rather boring dinner party guest.

How does Mother Theresa relate to Israel? Some people who feel uncomfortable with Israel's image - particularly as perceived through the prism of photo number 1 - choose to counter that image with another of Israel as perfect, like we see in the good news sheet. This sheet, unlike all three of the photos, is in fact "accurate" (at least it appears to be). The question is, however: *Is its portrayal of Israel partial or whole, limited or rounded?* I would make the argument that the sheet's view of Israel is as one-dimensional as that of the photos – and, as such, it is equally problematic from an educational perspective.

Why, then, is Barack Obama the character whom we would most want to have round for dinner with our friends?

Because he is interesting, intelligent, cultured, and charismatic, with a treasure trove of experience and wisdom. He is also, one would imagine, an amusing and entertaining person to talk with. And, crucially, he is not perfect. He is a flawed individual. As he so memorably put it in his pre-elections infomercial, "I am not a perfect man; I will not be a perfect president." If he were really a guest at your table, with no press present and no holds barred, you wouldn't want to just listen to him and look up to him. You'd want to engage him in serious conversation. You'd want to ask him all sorts of questions: Is it really possible to unite people across deep ideological divides? How can you ensure that nothing will distract you from your presidential potential? How can you play the healthcare issue differently? Why did you choose this policy, why did you reject that one? And so on. No doubt, you would also have answers to some of these questions that you would wish to put to President Obama: it would not be a one-way street. So Barack Obama is such a desirable dinner party guest *because* he would give you the chance to develop a rich, engaging, interesting, dialogical, two-way conversation with him - a conversation that would be at times serious, at times deeply meaningful, at times amusing, perhaps at times infuriating, but never boring.

That is the metaphor for Israel engagement which I believe we should be seeking. Israel must be presented as a conversation partner who is all those things: serious, meaningful, interesting, engaging, amusing, culturally creative, artistic, and at times infuriating, frustrating, and flawed. Israel should present the opportunity for us as Jews to engage in conversation with it on these levels.

Now the question is: how?

makōm מקוֹם
Israel. In Real Life

Part 5: Conversation as a Metaphor for Israel Engagement (20 mins)

In the final twenty minutes, your task is to move from a critique of existing paradigms and conceptions of Israel in the world Jewish community, into the beginning of the explanation of a new one, or new ones. In this final lap, it will not be possible to set out a new paradigm in its entirety, so the main goal is to open up the basic idea and leave people eager to come to the next session and develop the idea further. In the second session, you'll be able to return to build some theoretical grounding for what we are doing, but at the end of this first session, it's crucial to give people a sense of how this different mode might look.

Direct participants to turn to the next page in the handout. Explain that for the final few minutes of this session, we're going to take just one of the "images" of Israel that we've discussed so far, and think about how it could be treated differently. Instead of seeing Israel as a poverty-stricken, third world country, or *ignoring* the issue of poverty in Israel, how do we address it in a more sophisticated way?

On the handout, you'll see a number of bullet points, offering suggestions for conversations about poverty in Israel. Ask the participants to get into a *chevruta* (explain what this means if you think it won't be clear to everyone; they can get into groups of 3, if it works better than pairs), and do the following:

a) Take a minute or two to look through the list on your own.
b) With your *chevruta*, agree on one particular bullet point to talk about.
c) Spend 5-10 minutes doing just that.
d) After 5-10 minutes, spend 2-3 minutes on the next set of questions ("How was it for you?").
e) Then we'll come together and share thoughts as a whole group.

During *chevruta* time, you should wander round so that you get a sense of the conversations going on in each *chevruta*, or small group. At the end, you should conduct a short whole group review, in which you ask participants to share their thoughts about *either* the particular conversations they had, *or* the larger questions of how it was to engage in poverty in Israel on this level. *You may need to stress that*: you are not making any programmatic or policy suggestions or claims at this point; you are not suggesting that they do this exact activity in their communities, or that they directly apply anything. This is simply an attempt to expose this leadership group to the idea that the issue of poverty in Israel can be spoken about in a more serious, sophisticated, realistic, nuanced, and yet still compelling (perhaps even more compelling) way.

makōm מָקוֹם
Israel. In Real Life

In the final two minutes of the session, bring things to a close.
Remind the participants of the following ideas that we have covered today:

- When Israel is presented in a one-dimensional, negative way, it can have extremely problematic consequences for Jewish education and identity.
- The metaphor of conversation can be a powerful one to inform our work in Israel engagement.
- Hopefully, this final activity has given you a taste of how the metaphor of conversation can actually transform what we do in practice.
- In the next session, we'll spend some time building some theoretical foundations for this metaphor of conversation, and then we'll go deeper into how it can translate into compelling practical action. In the final session, we'll explore some actual examples of this new kind of Israel engagement that are rooted in this framework and talk about the "low-hanging fruit" that you can pick in your own context, in order to make big changes relatively easily and cheaply.

You can also give the participants some homework:
"Between now and next time, I'd like you to think about other conversations that you might want to have, with and about Israel and Israelis".

makōm מָקוֹם
Israel. In Real Life

Appendix: Sources for Handout

- **Guests-R-Us vouchers**

1. **Photo 1**: Israel Engagement as Response to Criticism

2. **Photo 2:** Israel Engagement as Response to Crisis

3. **Photo 3:** Israel Engagement as Response to Poverty

4. The Good News Antidote

5. A Case Study In One Set Of Images: Potential Conversations About Poverty In Israel And World Jewry's Relationship To It

6. How was it for you?

makōm מקום
Israel. In Real Life

Guests-R-Us

- - - - - - - - Promotional Voucher - - - - - - - -

Dinner parties getting boring?
Same faces, same conversations?
Run out of ideas to spice up the evening?

Guests-R-Us has the answer!

We will provide you with the dinner party guest of your choice to liven up your evening.

You have been selected to receive this promotional voucher for 1 (one) free guest for the evening of your choice. Please indicate your choice below:*

a) Mother Theresa
b) Pat Robertson
c) The homeless guy from the street outside our corporate office
d) Barack Obama

*Please think carefully before making your selection, because guests are non-transferable and non-refundable.

Guests-R-Us

- - - - - - - - Promotional Voucher - - - - - - - -

Dinner parties getting boring?
Same faces, same conversations?
Run out of ideas to spice up the evening?

Guests-R-Us has the answer!

We will provide you with the dinner party guest of your choice to liven up your evening.

You have been selected to receive this promotional voucher for 1 (one) free guest for the evening of your choice. Please indicate your choice below:*

e) Mother Theresa
f) Pat Robertson
g) The homeless guy from the street outside our corporate office
h) Barack Obama

*Please think carefully before making your selection, because guests are non-transferable and non-refundable.

makōm מקוֹם
Israel. In Real Life

1. Israel Engagement as Response to Criticism

An Israeli policeman and a Palestinian on the Temple Mount.

2. Israel Engagement as Response to Crisis

makōm מקום
Israel. In Real Life

3. Israel Engagement as Response to Poverty

makōm מָקוֹם
Israel. In Real Life

4. The Good News Antidote

From the home page of www.newsoftheday.com

**Facts about the 100th smallest country,
with less than 1/1000th of the world's population.**

- Israel leads the world in the number of scientists and technicians in the workforce, with 145 per 10,000 - as opposed to 85 in the U.S., over 70 in Japan, and less than 60 in Germany. With over 25% of its work force employed in technical professions, Israel places first in this category as well.
- Israel has the highest ratio of university degrees to the population in the world.
- Israel has the highest per capita ratio of scientific publications in the world by a large margin, as well as one of the highest per capita rates of patents filed.
- In proportion to its population, Israel has the largest number of start-up companies in the world. In absolute terms, Israel has the largest number of startup companies than any other country in the world, except the US (3,500 companies mostly in hi-tech).
- Israel has the highest percentage in the world of home computers per capita.
- Israel has the highest average living standards in the Middle East. The per capita income was over $17,500 (in 2000), exceeding that of the UK.
- With more than 3,000 high-tech companies and start-ups, Israel has the highest concentration of hi-tech companies in the world (apart from the Silicon Valley).
- Israel's $100 billion economy is larger than all of its immediate neighbors combined.
- The cell phone was developed in Israel by Motorola-Israel. Motorola built its largest development center worldwide in Israel.
- Windows NT software was developed by Microsoft-Israel.
- The Pentium MMX Chip technology was designed in Israel at Intel.
- Both Microsoft and Cisco built their only R&D facilities outside the US in Israel.
- On a per capita basis, Israel has the largest number of biotech start-ups

makōm מקוֹם
Israel. In Real Life

5. A Case Study in One Set of Images: Potential Conversations about Poverty in Israel and World Jewry's Relationship to it

- Should the Jewish state be one in which the gap between rich and poor is the second highest in the western world? How do we feel about that as *Jews*? What kind of economic structure would we like to see in Israel from a Jewish perspective? The western country with the highest gap is America - how do we feel about that as Jews?

- How do we as Jews respond to poverty in general: in our own country and in the world at large? Is poverty at home different from poverty in Israel? As Jews and human beings, what is our responsibility towards poverty in our own country, in Israel, and elsewhere?

- Is there a difference between the various kinds of poverty in Israel? Should we treat poor ultra-orthodox communities differently from poor Sephardi communities, since the former are poor in large part because of their religious and lifestyle *choices*, whereas the latter are poor against their will? How do these questions relate to poverty at home and elsewhere?

- What should the Jewish state's reaction be to poverty in the Arab sectors? Again, should we think about Bedouin and Druze poverty differently from general Arab poverty, because the former communities serve in the army whereas the latter do not? Should the worldwide Jewish community be responsible for raising funds for Arab welfare in Israel?

- How do we address the sectors of Israel that posess great wealth? What do we do with images of: the "silicon valley" of Ramat Gan? the expensive yachts moored in Herzliya harbour? the Israel Philharmonic Orchestra's gala events? Are these images of Israel which we want to share, because they increase our pride - or do they conflict with our fund-raising messages?

- What number on the world's GDP per capita scale would we like to see Israel? Would we want Israel to be the richest country in the world? What is our ideal economic vision of how Israel "looks"? (This question isn't necessarily completely ridiculous – imagine for a moment what could happen if Israel struck oil off the Mediterranean coast… from my lips to God's ears! ☺)

- How might Rambam's highest level of *Tzedakah* – giving someone a job – translate into strategic and policy decisions about where, what and how to give money to Israel? Which of your shul's, or the Israel Appeal's, or the world Jewish community's current projects satisfy that highest level? Which don't> And which could be nuanced, massaged, or ratcheted up, in order to do so?

- How could we encourage Jews to play a greater role in deciding where their donations to Israel actually go? How can we create true partnerships between Jews and specific Israeli projects? How can philanthropy and *Tzedakah*, on the largest and smallest levels, be leveraged to serve positive educational purposes and to create or enrich or increase a dialogical, conversational relationship between Jews in Israel and around the world?

- What different approaches to Israel's economic situation are currently being offered by different political parties? What might current internal machinations in the various parties do to Israel's economic policies? Do our donations to Israel implicitly favour, support or strengthen particular political parties or coalitions within the Israeli political landscape?

makōm מקום
Israel. In Real Life

6. How Was It for You?

- How was it for you to have these conversations about poverty in Israel on this level?
- How was it different from the usual kinds of discussions you hear about poverty in Israel?
- Are these the kinds of conversations you'd like to see happen in your synagogue, your community, your school, your JCC, your family?
- If yes - how could you begin to get these conversations to happen? What barriers stand in your way? How can you think about overcoming these barriers?
- If no - why not?

makōm מָקוֹם
Israel. In Real Life