We need to talk about Israel.

Too often it seems that our conversations about Israel are either too cerebral to be meaningful, or too passionate to be intelligent. We need to be able to bring both our heads and our hearts to bear. This is no easy task, as we face at least three challenges.

Coming up...
- What are we dealing with?
- What is 4HQ?
- How can 4HQ be useful?
- Makom training in 4HQ
Tent or Tank?

Much as we might wish to avoid the issue, we need to be able to clarify for ourselves and for our communities, what is okay and what is not okay. The “Tent of Consensus” that everyone is hoping to enlarge while feeling it is ever-shrinking into more of a military-feeling tank. How can we easily delineate the parameters of the tent, making it a Middle Eastern kind of tent – that has defined edges, but that is open to all sides?

Universal/Particular

We know that the Jewish community is not a cultural bubble unto itself. If we’re going to talk about something, we have to be able to talk about it in universal terms. In-group talk, and in-group expectations won’t cut it any longer. But at the same time, we know that it would be weird for us to talk about Israel without referring to specifically Jewish ideas. How can we speak in universal terms without losing our own particular authenticity?
Simplifying Complexity

Finally, how can we approach the endless complexities of Israel – its nature, and local responses to it – in a way that doesn’t overwhelm and intimidate? In short, **can we sum up the complexity in a simple way that isn’t simplistic?**

At Makom, the Israel Education Lab, we believe we have something to offer. An approach and a program that addresses all three of these challenges.

Let’s start from the universal. We would suggest that there are four questions underlying all conflict in the world... You name it: Climate change, wars, immigration and refugees, racism and poverty - the greatest conflicts afflicting us are because people have different answers to the same four questions.

**1. How do we keep safe?**

One driving question underlying most news headlines is “How do we keep safe?” How do we identify threats, what is the best way of neutralizing such threats, and when might we know these threats are no longer? One need only follow the debate over the Iran deal, the war on terror, military conflict and coalitions to recognize the heat generated by each of our different answers to this first question.
2. How should “We” behave?
The second question is: “Who are We and how should We behave?” In particular in this individualized and globalized world, what do we each think about our collective identities? In America – how do our traditions affect our choices in handling Mexican immigration, for example? On the one hand, we are an immigrant nation. On the other hand we traditionally speak English not Spanish… how do our traditions play out in the present? And what of our solidarity with fellow Americans? What are our responsibilities to each of us in terms of health insurance and employment? And what of those who are “not-us”? Do we owe more to those born in American than to others?

3. How can we be free?
The third question is simple, but growing increasingly complex: “How can we be free?” In the Western world, democratic governments continue to lose credibility, and individual choice is emerging more as a value than a circumstance. In this environment, freedom of speech, for example, becomes a battleground.
4. How do we make a place our home?

Finally, we are seeing that the questions of home, homeland, and territory has returned with ever-increasing urgency. On the one hand, social media and climate change call into question the relevance of one’s physical location. On the other hand, issues of sustainability, the nature of public space, and immigration issues have taken center stage. Border crossings and territorial incursions have become crucial issues in the Crimea, Calais, and California to name but a few examples. Add to that the radical blurring, changing and deletion of national borders in Lebanon/Syria/Iraq, and we can see that issues of Place are more relevant than ever.

Often the most burning issues draw on all four questions together. As refugees desperately seek safety in Europe, and Europeans ask themselves what is their distinctly European response as well as their national response, while the principle of freedom of movement is suddenly in question, and borders represent a moral challenge – we can see that addressing these four questions is a way of speaking to the world, not just to Jews.
From Universal to Jewish

What is the Jewish way of wording these crucial universally-shared questions?

We at Makom add a question-mark to the four Hebrew words that make up the penultimate line of the Hatikvah Israeli National Anthem:

“To be” asks questions of Safety and Security. “People” asks about who We are and how We should behave. “Free” asks about Rights and Responsibilities, and “In Our Land” asks questions of home, homeland, and borders.
Before breaking down how these four questions play out in an Israeli context, let’s consider the four words as a sentence. “To Be a People, Free In Our Land” is something of a consensus aspiration. It is difficult to find, even in the most radical leftish firmament, a condemnation of the Kurds’ struggle to be a Kurdish People, free in their land of Kurdistan. There was also a huge groundswell of popular understanding if not support for the Scots to define themselves as such.

In this language of liberal national aspiration, Israel is the embodiment of being the People of Israel, Free in the Land of Israel. There is also significant international support for the Palestinians to be a Palestinian People Free in the Land of Palestine. Indeed some might define the “conflict” as the clash that results from two Peoples defining “Our Land” as the same piece of geography.

Anyone who does not agree that we have the right to be the People of Israel free in the Land of Israel, is “outside the tent”. 
Rather than excluding some, this construction allows us to understand and include many more people “inside the tent”, and to dialogue far more constructively with those outside.

Here the Four Hatikvah Questions (4HQ) come into their own. For while we can expect those “inside the tent” to agree with the sentence, we don’t have to reach consensus on the answers to the questions!

That is, while we all want the People of Israel To Be Free In The Land of Israel, we don’t have to agree on the details!

**To be?** All of us inside the tent agree that Israel should exist. But we do not all agree on the way we should define an existential threat. It is entirely legitimate to argue about the best means to defeat or neutralize a threat, and we are bound to continue to question whether or when we are free to disregard a threat and to just be...

**The Jewish People?** It would be impossible to be “inside the tent” of pro-Israel discourse without acknowledging the centrality of the Jewish People to the enterprise. But it is completely fair to question the way in which Jewish tradition and religion plays a role in modern Israel. Questions of social solidarity within Israel, and between Jews throughout the world will always be ongoing policy questions. And the way in which the Jewish People should relate to people who are not Jewish will rightly resonate throughout our moral considerations. The fact that we might argue on this question does not make us anti-Zionists...
Free? Real lovers of Israel cannot imagine a State of Israel that is not democratic. But questions of pluralism, electoral systems, of how ongoing control over areas East of the Green Line affects our democracy, questions of human rights, creativity, innovation – these are the kind of questions that keep us alive!

In Our Land? The days of considering the Uganda Plan are long gone – Israel must be located in Biblical Israel. But which part? How large a part? With access to other parts? What makes a homeland? These are all legitimate, live, and crucial questions.

The Zionist enterprise can be defined as the ongoing drive to implement ever-better answers to these four questions of Hope.

When it comes down to it, the Israel conversation is made up of four questions. The Four Hatikvah Questions. 4HQ. The Four Questions of Hope.

4HQ is a simple way to contain the complexity that is Israel. It is universal yet particular, and it offers a constructive approach to the “Big Tent”.
How can we put 4HQ to use?

A Thinking Tool

First of all, 4HQ is a way to listen to Israel conversations, and a way to think clearly about Israel issues. What is she saying? What is he shouting about? Listen for which of the underlying questions they are asking, and address them. The conversation will be far richer, far more constructive. When the latest headline screams across the Washington Post or New York Times, see where it addresses which of the Four Hatikvah Questions. Is it about existential threat? Is it about being Jewish? Is it about democracy? The Land?

A Mapping and Planning Tool

When looking at a calendar of events, ask yourself whether you are covering all four of the questions? If you notice a weight on questions of security and land, with little addressing freedom, perhaps your programming has a right-leaning bias. If freedom dominates your agenda, with no acknowledgement of threats, then the chances are you are leaning left-wards! Programming that wishes to both represent the fullness of Israel, and the breadth of your community’s connections to Israel, should attempt to address all four questions.

An Aid to Celebration

When we celebrate Chanukah, or Pesach, there are one or two texts, a few traditions, that we can easily refer to every year. But Yom Ha’atzmaut? What exactly is it that we are celebrating? For the first time in two thousand years, ever since May 14th, 1948, we have been able to answer all four primary questions of hope with a resounding “Yes!” Do we exist?
Are we a living breathing People? Do we rule ourselves democratically in the Land of Israel? Yom Ha’atzmaut is the day to celebrate the fundamentals.

A Response Tool

When the latest hot topic comes burning across the media, and the community looks to you to convene a conversation in response, we tend to look to 4HQ. For example, when Prime Minister Netanyahu came to speak to the U.S. Congress, some communities wished to watch a live screening of the speech, and then sit around tables to talk about what they saw and heard. We at Makom provided them with discussion table mats, presenting key questions in the framework of 4HQ.
Makom training in 4HQ

Tools are one thing, but learning how to use them is another thing entirely!

- Makom can come to you and run short or in-depth customized training for your staff, lay leaders, and/or para-professionals.
- We can offer 4HQ training as a component of your trip to Israel, and/or build for you a 4HQ-filtered tour of Israel.
- You can turn to us for source materials, discussion guides, etc, according to your needs.

For more details please contact Robbie Gringras, Makom’s Creative Director, on robbieg@jafi.org

Makom creates content and educates trains leaders to embrace the vibrant complexity of Israel: The People, the Place, and the Promise. Our expert team works across the spectrum in Israel and the Jewish world to empower educators and activists to ask tough questions, articulate enthralling visions, and to craft honest, engaging programs. Makom has developed 1000 educational units, and delivered seminars for 15,000 educators and leaders. Makom is the Education Lab of The Jewish Agency.