



Early Voices of Israel

And What They Mean Today

A Program Guide For Facilitators

A rich and varied debate existed among early advocates for a Jewish, democratic homeland. How can we carry forward that tradition of respectful disagreement among supporters of Israel? This program draws on the voices of early Zionist thinkers as a launching point for discussion about broadening today's Israel debate.

Suggested Audience

12-30 participants who are involved in Israel-related issues on campus, specifically from groups that are supportive of Israel's future in diverse ways, for the purposes of this program.

Suggested Format

The program should be led by a facilitator or ideally co-facilitators representing more than one group. There should be space to move around the room and chairs in a circle that can be grouped into small clusters.

Time

1 hour, 15 minute program.

Materials

- Print-outs of four (or more) excerpts from thinkers, and tape for posting
- Copies of participant's handout
- Flip chart or whiteboard and markers

Set-up

Tape four (or more) excerpts around the room. There are six excerpts provided, and you may choose to use all of them or just four.

Introduction (20 Minutes)

Who's in the Room

Facilitators welcome everyone and start off the introductions. Everyone goes around the room and introduces themselves, how they heard about the program and what group they are part of (if any), and a fun fact about themselves (optional – or use your favorite icebreaker). Facilitators thank everyone for being here and emphasize how much they appreciate the groups that are coming together for this discussion.

Why We're Here

Facilitator explains: The group is gathered to discuss an important question that is very hot right now, on both a national and campus level – what it means to be a supporter of Israel. To better inform the current debate, it may be helpful to look to voices from the past. In today's program, we will look at a variety of voices from Israel's inception, i.e. from Zionist thinkers of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Over the next hour or so, we'll have a conversation about this question, and everyone will have a chance to express their thoughts and listen to other people's thoughts. First, we'll talk about our own connections to Israel, then we'll discuss the quotes, and finally we'll talk about what we can take away from this conversation and put into action on our campus.

Group Agreements

Facilitator emphasizes that this will be a space for honest and respectful discussion. There may be real disagreement in the group, and that's okay as long as it is expressed in a respectful way. To help the conversation be as honest and respectful as possible, there are some suggested group agreements on the participant's handout. Facilitator invites participants to go around the room and read the suggested group agreements out loud (at your discretion). Then facilitator asks if these agreements work for everyone, or if they have anything they would like to add.

Suggested Group Agreements

- Speak honestly from your personal opinions and experiences
- Listen fully and “hang in there” when you hear something challenging
- Share airtime and don't interrupt others
- Avoid personal attacks – focus on critiquing ideas
- Try not to make assumptions about other peoples' beliefs or motives – instead, talk with them and test your assumption
- If someone speaks in a small group or one-on-one, assume the comment is confidential unless they give you permission to share it
- Make the most of this chance to learn from each other

Personal Connections

In small groups of 3-5, participants each get a turn to answer the following question. This is not a time to debate, but to listen fully to each person's response. Each person should have about 2 minutes to speak.

Say a few words about your personal connection to the region. Why do you care about the Middle East and what happens there, and why do you choose to devote energy to these issues? What from your personal experience has led you in this direction?

After everyone has gotten a chance to speak, come back together in the large group. Facilitator asks for highlights from the groups, reminding them to check with each other before retelling a personal experience or opinion of another group member.

Part I: Early Voices (30 Minutes)

Facilitator asks the group:

"Imagine that you were starting from a blank slate to build a Jewish homeland. Which of these excerpts most resonates with you as a vision for that goal?"

Participants walk around the room and read all the posted quotes. Then they sit by the one that resonates the most.

In the groups that form around the excerpts, participants talk for a few minutes about the following questions:

What does this excerpt mean to you, and why does it resonate?

What are the key elements in this vision of a Jewish homeland? What do you imagine this thinker would say today?

Then in each small group, count off by 3. Then form new groups (the 1s, the 2s, the 3s) – there should be three groups with a mix of people who chose different quotes. The groups explain to each other what they just spoke about, using these questions as a guide:

What are the similarities and differences in these Zionist thinkers' visions? What do you like about the visions? What does not jive with you as much?

Part II: Current Voices (20 Minutes)

Come back into the large group and discuss:

What were some of the key differences or points of contention in these different visions for Israel?

How do the questions raised by the early voices play out today? What kinds of voices supporting Israel are being heard in current discourse?

In your opinion, is there a need to broaden the debate about what it means to be supportive of Israel?

Then discuss where to take this conversation further and how the groups can work together concretely in the future.

What can we do on our campus to demonstrate that a broad debate about Israel is as necessary today as it was in the past?

Some possibilities could be:

- Writing a joint op-ed to the school newspaper about how a broad definition and debate about what it means to be supportive of Israel is important.
- Planning another joint event, or co-sponsoring each other's events when appropriate.
- Coming up with guidelines for respectful debate on issues surrounding Israel on campus—a joint effort between all the relevant groups.

Closing (5 Minutes)

Facilitators thank everyone for coming and joining in the lively discussion. Specific people are assigned to take the lead on next steps. Be sure the organizers have everyone's contact information.

After the event, follow up and thank participants and co-organizers. Continue the momentum on next steps!