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Sichot Kashot | שיחות קשות | Difficult Conversations

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Abstract

This capstone project was intended to explore some of the difficult topics faced by the progressive Jewish community today. After research into several topics, I settled on three to address in a series of podcast episodes. The first episode explores the recent stories and investigations into American Reform Jewish institutions regarding sexual misconduct. The second episode is one of what could be hundreds of conversations about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The third and final episode in the series is a discussion on the uptick in antisemitism in the United States, with a focus on college campuses.

I chose a podcast format to bring important, yet difficult conversations to an easily accessible medium. I invited recently and soon to be ordained Reform clergy to join me in discussion. Each episode is based on a specific set of texts organized into text sheets. In an attempt to inspire the practice of engaging in difficult conversations, I encourage listeners to print the text sheet and take the conversation into their own spaces.

Acknowledgments

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I would also like to thank my parents Ruth Anderson, and David Anderson, z"l, who taught me to speak out and speak loudly from a very young age. They inspired me to love justice and to offer compassion to all people, regardless of difference. I am eternally grateful for the example they set, and the beautiful, messy life they provided me. I also appreciate my big brother, Jacob Anderson, who constantly reminds me of all the reasons I should continue to trust and believe in myself.

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Section One: Introduction

My most memorable experiences as a rabbinical student have included discussions of complex topics. I engaged in conversations about Israel/Palestine, national and global politics, antisemitism, racism, and more. Many times, the discussions were fruitful, but not always. Those who were willing to engage with me in this way were the congregants, classmates, and community leaders with whom I built the most significant relationships.

Our society has become increasingly divisive since I began studying at HUC-JIR in 2017. Racism and antisemitism were on display in full force throughout the Trump Presidency, and the hate he inspired continues to thrive. During my first year of rabbinical school, I watched the coverage of the Unite the Right Rally and counter-protest in Charlottesville from my apartment in Jerusalem. To add to the horrifying incident of a car plowing into the crowd murdering one and injuring several others, then President Donald Trump claimed that there were “very fine people on both sides.”¹ In 2018, we lost 11 Jewish community members during the first mass shooting in an American synagogue in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, at the Tree of Life Synagogue. In 2019, another Jewish life was taken on Shabbat during Passover when a shooter opened fire inside the Chabad synagogue in Poway, California. Then, in 2020, our country and the world witnessed the footage of a Minneapolis police officer murdering George Floyd, which led to one of the largest citizen uprisings in United States history. The United States government responded to these protests by deploying the National Guard. These are just a few significant events during my rabbinical studies, which have increased fear in our community and divided our nation.

¹ Gray, Rosie. "Trump Defends White-Nationalist Protesters: 'Some Very Fine People on Both Sides'." *The Atlantic*. June 09, 2021. <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2017/08/trump-defends-white-nationalist-protesters-some-very-fine-people-on-both-sides/537012/>.

This culture of divisiveness has crept into nearly every facet of society. Many find themselves at such odds with others that they become unable to tolerate hearing opposing views. Disagreement moves us forward in thought and action, requiring us to examine our own biases and question their validity.

The Talmud describes the debates of Beit Hillel and Beit Shammai [two houses of study at the turn of the Common Era]. Through these texts, we learn that debate and disagreement are core facets of Jewish tradition. Commenting on the preservation of the differences between one school of thought and the other, the Talmud tells us that both Beit Hillel and Beit Shammai's contradictory teachings are preserved, *שְׁאֵלּוֹ וְאֵלּוֹ דְּבִרֵי אֱלֹהִים חַיִּים*, because both these and those are the words of the living God.

While Jewish law typically favors the opinions of Beit Hillel, Talmud also preserves the opinion of Beit Shammai. A question was raised as to why the opinion of Beit Hillel was favored. Talmud teaches that out of respect for their fellow scholars, Beit Hillel would teach both their own opinions as well as the opinions of their rival Beit Shammai. They even taught the lessons of Beit Shammai first.² From this, we learn that the words of the living God are not one side or the other. God's words are both Hillel and Shammai!

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² Talmud, Eruvin 13b

When I began this project, I planned to host multiple conversations about the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict from different aspects to implement my preferred style of Israel education, teaching multiple narratives. However, I quickly realized that several difficult things were going on in the Jewish community that I felt needed to be discussed publicly. In the end, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict became only one of the three topics that I addressed, along with growing antisemitism and sexual misconduct in the North American Jewish communities.

While I only directly covered Israel in one of the three episodes I produced, I ended up formulating my guidelines for approaching difficult conversations based on what I learned on my trips into Palestinian neighborhoods with Encounter Programs. Encounter is an educational organization working toward informed, courageous and resilient American & Israeli Jewish communal leadership on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.³ Encounter's guidelines for "Communicating in Conflict" offer suggestions on asking questions and receiving responses from the group that may conflict with our own understanding of a situation. Among these guidelines, they suggest speaking only for yourself, giving specific examples rather than making broad generalizations, and "listening with resilience when hearing something hard."⁴

I chose to speak about Israel in one of my episodes because Israel studies have been a significant focus of my rabbinical studies. In May of 2021, as I was finalizing the details of this capstone project, rocket fire flew between Israel and Gaza, and Israel again became the

³ "Our Mission." Encounter Programs. <https://www.encounterprograms.org/about-us-2/our-mission/>.

⁴ "Communicating in Conflict: Resources." Encounter Programs. <https://www.encounterprograms.org/our-programs/continuing-education/communicating-in-conflict-resources/>.

center of political conversations across the country.⁵ Amid this crisis for Israeli and Palestinian citizens, nearly 100 American rabbinical and cantorial students signed and published a letter condemning Israel for protecting herself. They compared the experience of Palestinians in Israel and the territories to the racial discrimination that the Black community faces in the United States.⁶ A little over a week later, after the fighting between Israel and Gaza had settled, I cosigned a letter in response to my colleagues who condemned Israel. We criticized the lack of nuance in their letter, which failed to include the experience of Israeli citizens who spent hours upon hours in bomb shelters and the terrorist nature of Gaza's leaders, Hamas. Finally, we invited our classmates to take this conversation out of the press and bring it into our communal spaces where we could learn from each other.⁷ While I did not reference these articles in the episode on Israel, the necessity to bring conversations about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict into public spaces became even more important to me.

My episode on antisemitism was motivated by the significant spike in antisemitic attacks that the United States has experienced over the past few years. The ADL reported that antisemitic incidents hit an all-time high in 2019⁸ and has remained at historic levels in the years since.⁹ According to the FBI, Jews were the most targeted religious group in the United States in

⁵ Kingsley, Patrick. "After Years of Quiet, Israeli-Palestinian Conflict Exploded. Why Now?" The New York Times. May 15, 2021. <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/05/15/world/middleeast/israel-palestinian-gaza-war.html>.

⁶ "Community: 'Gates of Tears': Rabbinical and Cantorial Students Stand for Solidarity with Palestinians." The Forward. May 13, 2021. <https://forward.com/subscribe/469583/gates-of-tears-rabbinical-and-cantorial-students-stand-for-solidarity-with/>.

⁷ "Our Fellow Rabbinical Students Are Wrong to Criticize Israel When It's under Attack." The Forward. May 27, 2021. <https://forward.com/subscribe/470464/our-fellow-rabbinical-students-are-wrong-to-criticize-israel-when-its/>.

⁸ "Antisemitic Incidents Hit All-Time High in 2019." Anti-Defamation League. <https://www.adl.org/news/press-releases/antisemitic-incidents-hit-all-time-high-in-2019>.

⁹ "U.S. Antisemitic Incidents Remained at Historic High in 2020." Anti-Defamation League. <https://www.adl.org/news/press-releases/us-antisemitic-incidents-remained-at-historic-high-in-2020>.

2020, despite being only two percent of the US population.¹⁰ With those statistics in mind, I was surprised in my work with the Jewish Community Relations Council to find that very few people outside of the Jewish community understand how prevalent and damaging antisemitism is, not only to the Jewish people but also to democracy in general.

My third topic is on a subject I never imagined would become a part of the history of the Reform Jewish community; sexual misconduct and discrimination. As someone who has faced sexual harassment and gender discrimination on multiple occasions in my personal and professional life, I felt compelled to address the news publicly. In 2021 and 2022, three of the most important institutions in the American Reform Jewish movement hired outside law firms to investigate the actions of the institutions, their employees, and their lay leadership over the past several generations.^{11 12 13} While these reports dive deep into several areas of misconduct, this episode of my podcast focuses specifically on the history of sexual misconduct at Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion and issues of sexual misconduct in Reform Youth groups. When I recorded the episode, the Union for Reform Judaism report, which covers issues of sexual misconduct in Reform summer camps and youth groups, had not yet been released. However, an article was written about teen

¹⁰ "AJC Deeply Troubled by FBI Hate Crimes Data Showing Overall Increase, Jews Most-Targeted Religious Group." AJC. November 19, 2021. <https://www.ajc.org/news/ajc-deeply-troubled-by-fbi-hate-crimes-data-showing-overall-increase-jews-most-targeted>.

¹¹ Morgan Lewis, "Report of Investigation into Allegations of Misconduct at Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion," <http://huc.edu/sites/default/files/About/PDF/HUC%20REPORT%20OF%20INVESTIGATION%20--%2011.04.21.pdf>

¹² Alcalaw, "Report of the CCAR Ethics System Investigation," <https://10pzbn347s7w1b9a412ijnxn-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/Alcalaw-Report-of-Investigation.pdf>

¹³ Debevoise and Plimpton LLP, "The Report of the Independent Investigation," https://urj.org/sites/default/files/2022-02/URJ_Investigation_Report.pdf

experiences in American Jewish youth groups, and an Instagram was created to share these stories and others like them.^{14 15}

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The covid-19 pandemic forced educators, including those in the Jewish community, to embrace technology in many new ways. Synagogues who had been resisting streaming prayer services for years found themselves suddenly investing in new equipment and technology necessary to bring communal prayer to their community members who were individually quarantined in their homes. From my home office in Northern Kentucky, I led my third set of High Holy Day services for Temple B’nai Israel of Petoskey, Michigan. Unlike many of my classmates, I was lucky enough to build a relationship with my congregation for two years prior to the pandemic. That relationship allowed us to explore using technology to provide new and different ways to engage in prayer. The piece that I created which gained the most traction was a 15 minute recorded forgiveness meditation. It got three times the “hits” that my pre-recorded sermons received!

I chose the podcast format to host these conversations because podcasts are a fast-growing medium to deliver content to audiences worldwide.¹⁶ To help our community engage in Jewish learning, we ought to create easy-to-access and entertaining opportunities. This

¹⁴ "Investigation: How Jewish Youth Groups Are Breeding A Toxic Sexual Culture For Teens." New Voices. September 15, 2021. <https://newvoices.org/2021/07/13/investigation-how-jewish-youth-groups-are-breeding-a-toxic-sexual-culture-for-teens/>.

¹⁵ Jewish On Campus, *Instagram*, <https://www.instagram.com/jews4empoweredconsent/?hl=en>

¹⁶ Adgate, Brad. "As Podcasts Continue To Grow In Popularity, Ad Dollars Follow." Forbes. December 10, 2021. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/bradadgate/2021/02/11/podcasting-has-become-a-big-business/?sh=46244ad72cfb>.

podcast is intended to bring a fresh approach to Jewish learning by combining text study, storytelling, and casual conversation between friends.

Section Two: Episodes Background & Summaries

Episode 1: Generations of Sexual Misconduct in American Jewish Institutions

Guest Profile

To join me for this first episode, I invited Rabbi Zoe McCoon, who has dedicated significant time to learning and teaching about human intimacy.

Rabbi Zoe McCoon is a Bay Area rabbi serving Temple Beth Torah in Fremont, CA. She is an activist and educator addressing topics tied to identity, intimacy, and relationships through a Jewish lens. She was ordained from Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion in Cincinnati, OH in May 2021.

Rabbi Zoe was raised in Flint, Michigan. She received her Bachelor of Arts in Women's Studies from the University of Michigan - Ann Arbor. During her time in undergraduate studies, she developed a curriculum for post-b'nai mitzvah students to address Human Intimacy topics (gender, sexuality, healthy relationships, consent, mental health, etc) through a Jewish lens. Her rabbinic thesis, "Educating the Whole, Holy Human" was an exploration of how Jewish communities around the country currently address the topics previously described - if they do at all. One of her proudest achievements, during her time in rabbinical school, Rabbi Zoe partnered with the Brueggeman Center for Dialogue, Hebrew Union College, Xavier University, Women Helping Women, the YWCA of Greater Cincinnati, and many other community faith organizations to create a seminar to discuss how faith communities can better address gender-based violence in their midst. This brought together her volunteer work and training with Women Helping Women around

supporting survivors of sexual assault, partner violence, and stalking with her concern for building healthy, supportive spiritual communities. Rabbi Zoe currently serves on the Rabbinic Advisory Council of Shalom Bayit: Ending Domestic Violence in Jewish Homes.

I choose Rabbi McCoon for this conversation because of her dedication to sex and intimacy education and to survivors of intimate partner violence. As displayed in her bio, Rabbi McCoon is well versed on the topic of sexual misconduct. It was significant for me to include her voice in my podcast, as she is one of the people who inspired me and supported me in speaking out about this important and pertinent issue in Reform Jewish institutions.

Why study these texts?

The first set of texts that we discuss are statistics from the Center for Disease Control (CDC) and an organization specializing in the prevention of child sexual abuse, From Darkness to Light. It seemed important to address the national statistics on rape and child sexual abuse before speaking more specifically about what is happening in the Jewish community.

The second set of texts comes from an article that was published in July of 2021 titled, “Investigation- How Jewish Youth Groups Are Breeding A Toxic Sexual Culture For Teens,” and an Instagram page, @JewsForEmpoweredConsent, dedicated to sharing Jewish teens’ stories of sexual abuse and harassment. I chose to use these pieces to address the issues of sexual harassment, and assault occurring in teen communities across American Jewish movements because the investigation directly into the Union for Reform Judaism’s (URJ) youth groups and summer camps had not been released at the time of recording.

In the third set of texts, I chose to expose statements and stories from the HUC-JIR investigation that show generations of sexual misconduct have taken place across all four of our campuses. As the institution with a stronghold on Reform Rabbinic ordination in the West, I believe that HUC-JIR is responsible for protecting its student body from harm, should become a leader in Jewish intimacy education, and set a policy that protects people without power from those in power. I brought these stories into an even more public setting to keep this conversation at the center of our community forethought as we process the devastating reports released from the Central Conference For American Rabbis (CCAR), HUC-JIR, and the URJ.

Conversation summary

On the Statistics of Rape and Child Sexual Abuse

After getting through introductions, Rabbi McCoon and I began our conversation by discussing statistics from both the CDC and an organization specializing in preventing child sexual abuse, From Darkness to Light. Right away, Rabbi McCoon pointed out the CDC's lack of information on people who identify outside of the gender binary, which led us to the statistics on child sexual abuse, which were not delineated by gender. The specifics on the statistics can be found in the text sheet for episode one, on page 41 of this document.

Rabbi McCoon states, “On the one hand people are very protective of their children and want information they feel is appropriate to be talking to their children about in relation to sex, but unfortunately what that means is that there are some things that are just not talked about with

their children. So by the time that children are finding out about these kinds of things like consent, and who is allowed to touch your body, and if somebody touches you, what are you supposed to do? Those conversations don't happen until they are teenagers, and for many people, one in ten, it is too late.” She goes on to talk about how we need to get our kids the tools they need at an early age so they know who they can trust when questions come up, or if God forbid, they are faced with abuse themselves.

Zoe also introduces an intimacy curriculum, *Our Whole Lives*, created by a group of progressive Christian movements designed to support intimacy education from birth to death. She spoke about how she would love to bring this to her community but that she first needs to get buy-in. We discussed how important it is to bring the community along with you when you want to implement a significant piece of education that could ultimately change the institution's culture.

On Toxic Sex Culture in Jewish Youth Groups

I began this conversation by bringing up the point system revealed as a common “game” across movement youth groups. The game encourages sexual activity between teens for points. More points are gained when there is a power dynamic between “players,” such as one of them holding a position on a regional or national board. Zoe and I discussed a bit of what we saw and experienced growing up in Reform youth groups and summer camps.

While I did not grow up around the point system, Zoe did, and she filled me in on how it looked in her community and how it was different with every group of teens. Some appear to be more engaged in the point system where other groups see it as a joke and do not actually

“play” the game. In some cases, adult advisors encourage this behavior in the name of Jewish continuity.

Zoe brings up the point that while we want to protect our kids from harm and inappropriate relationships, we also want to encourage and support healthy relationships. She spoke about the need to communicate to teens that some actions are inappropriate but that having desire is not inappropriate. Zoe highlighted here the importance of making sure kids do not feel ashamed when they develop feelings for someone, and that they understand the bounds of appropriate behavior, including consent, from an early age. I responded to these comments with gratitude because I had been so stuck in the horrific details of stories from teens that I hadn't thought much about this part.

Next up, I read a report from the text sheet about a female camp counselor who taught some of her campers how to perform oral sex on a banana. After reading this disturbing story, I shared my concern that we are appointing teens who are not educated on healthy relationships. These teens are not prepared to care for and mentor younger kids. In theory, we love having kids of all ages working together and learning from each other, but we need to make sure that the older kids are prepared to teach the younger kids safe and healthy habits. We have to make intimacy education a priority in our communities for this to happen.

Another story that I shared aloud was about a teen who was assaulted in a public space at a BBYO convention in 2020. This teen girl sat at a table next to a teen boy she did not know, and he proceeded to stick his hand up her skirt and grope her with no warning. When she

asked him to stop, he ignored her. The only way she could escape the assault was to get up and leave the table. An equally significant blow came after the incident when her friend's only response was to suggest not sitting with strangers again. In response to this story, Zoe reminds us that we should not be grading assault on a scale, deciding who has it worse than someone else. Trauma is trauma, and we need to treat it as such. This story is a reminder that when we don't take people's stories of trauma seriously, we can accidentally convince them that it is not serious, and they are overreacting, ultimately causing a new layer of trauma.

I concluded this section by mentioning that the URJ's (then impending) report would be coming out soon. It would include more stories from summer camps and youth groups in the Reform Movement. I shared that I was both anxious to hear more stories and grateful that our movement is beginning to make space for these critical conversations.

On the HUC investigative report

To begin our discussion about the sexual misconduct laid out in the HUC report, I read the comment that the investigative law firm said they hear the most; that HUC is “a good ol’ boys club.” I explained that I was warned about this part of HUC’s culture when I began applying for rabbinical school. While Zoe had not heard about this part of the culture before attending HUC, she said that her undergraduate studies had prepared her to understand that this sort of behavior is systemic in our society and that no place of higher education was fully protected from it. Zoe also posed the question, “For an institution that so loves and cares for tradition, what happens when that tradition is a ‘good ol’ boys club?’” I responded by saying, “there are pieces of our tradition that we need to let go of.” I elaborated, clarifying we can’t

allow ourselves to forget about what happened, but this part of our culture needs to be treated as a part of our past that we must learn from.

In the next part of our conversation, I began with an overview of the kinds of issues reported and affected people. The report includes complaints over five generations, including a small number of current students. I shared that I don't believe the misconduct cases have shrunk over the years. Instead, I suggested that many current students feared retribution for coming forward because they knew that speaking out could endanger their ability to secure a job after ordination.

Zoe shared how painful it was to read about these stories, especially in the cases where victims were retraumatized when attempting to report the misconduct. Then she asks, "what happens when those who are visionaries for the future are not visioning a world or movement that supports survivors. One that preemptively does work to make sure human beings in trauma are not further traumatized by their Jewish experience?" One of Zoe's most significant concerns is that if we do not intentionally address these problematic parts of our culture and offer thoughtful education around intimacy, boundaries, and healthy relationships, we will recreate the same cycle of trauma over and over.

We concluded our conversation by discussing the connections between what is happening in our youth spaces and the misconduct at HUC. I said, "we are both products of the young movements within reform Judaism, and we both ended up at HUC." I note that while this is

not true for all HUC students, many of us grew up in reform youth groups and summer camps.

On Jewish Text

In this section, I introduced a text from Mishnah that suggests what justice could look like when a person is harmed. The text reads, “One who injures another person is liable on five counts: for the injury itself, for pain, for healing, for loss of time, and for embarrassment.”¹⁷

For Zoe, this text added a critical piece to our conversation; a discussion about accountability. She said, “to have accountability, you have to be willing to admit there is a problem in the first place, and then be willing to deal with what *teshuva*, or repentance, needs to look like, and this Mishnah text-only covers part of that process.” We discussed that the first step in the accountability process is admitting a problem exists, but many other steps need to follow. We also talked about how important it is to support survivors and feel safe in our spaces.

Zoe takes us deeper into this text by reminding us that in the case of the Mishna, there is a judge and a system in place to decide restitution. She asks, “In Jewish communities, who are the people taking responsibility to act as judge in these cases?” Then she answered her question by stating that we hold some of this responsibility as clergy. When people confide in clergy about their trauma, it is our responsibility to carry out something that supports the survivor.

¹⁷ Mishnah, Bava Kamma 8:1

On Ideas for the Future

In conclusion to our conversation, Zoe and I took a few minutes to think about the kinds of programs we would like to see in our community. I spoke about the need to create support groups and other forms of peer support so people suffering from trauma understand that they are not alone in their journey. Zoe brought up the need to create a Jewish organization focused on specifically supporting survivors of sexual violence. I agreed with her on the need for the organized Jewish community to develop professional positions that support victims of sexual violence. I suggested that this might be a role for Jewish Family Services.

Zoe also circled back to the importance of beginning intimacy education from a very young age. She said that education is a protection system because it prepares people to protect themselves. Along with the need to educate our congregants, Zoe and I spoke about how important it is for rabbinical students to learn about trauma and trauma-informed care to be prepared to support survivors in a way that will help and not further damage them. While some classes on these subjects exist, most are elective courses. I shared my belief that all rabbinical students should be required to learn about topics that affect such a large percentage of the population.

We ended our conversation by sharing resources on this topic:

- [Our Whole Lives Curriculum](#)
- [Rabbi Zoe McCoon's Book List](#)
- [In Cincinnati: Women Helping Women](#)
- [Think First and StaySafe](#)
- [Teen Lures](#)
- [Stewards of Children](#)
- Reach out to your local resources such as sex educators, family therapists, etc.

Episode 2: The Israeli-Palestinian Conflict,
Poetry on Hardships of the Conflict & Opinions from the Far Left

Guest Profile

To join me on this episode, I invited Ben Dyme, a HUC rabbinical student who will be ordained on the New York Campus in May of 2022.

Ben grew up in East Lansing, MI where he attended Congregation Shaarey Zedek. He currently lives in Brooklyn, NY and attends Hebrew Tabernacle Congregation in New York, NY. Ben graduated with a Bachelor of Arts in English Literature from the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor, and a Master of Liberal Arts in Creative Writing from the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia. He served as Program Associate at the University of Michigan Hillel in Ann Arbor. In Philadelphia, Ben worked as a barista at Borders Books and Music Cafe, and an administrative professional at the University of Pennsylvania. Ben served as Student Rabbi at Beth El Congregation in Harrisonburg, VA, and at Hebrew Tabernacle Congregation in New York, NY. He also served as a Cooperberg Rittmaster Rabbinic Intern at Congregation Beit Simchat Torah in New York, NY. Ben enjoys role playing games like Dungeons and Dragons. He is designing a similar game to use for Jewish educational purposes.

I chose Dyme for this episode because of our mutual love for Israel and Israel studies. Dyme and I have been lucky to study Israel together in the Leffell Fellow program with AIPAC and the I-Center, I-Fellows masters concentration program. We also took a cross-campus class

together entitled “The Crisis of Zionism,” which presented the furthest left view of Israel we had been exposed to during our time at HUC.

Why study these texts?

In the first set of texts, I chose two poems by Yehuda Amichai, who is “recognized as one of Israel’s finest poets.”¹⁸ Amichai was born in Germany and fled with his family at the age of twelve during Hitler’s rise to power. He fought in the 1948 Arab-Israeli war and remained in Israel until his death in the year 2000. I specifically selected two pieces of his poetry on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as I hoped it would enable us to share some of the stories we have been exposed to during our studies.

The second and third sets of text come from well-known, controversial Jewish journalist Peter Beinart. In addition to his career as a journalist, Beinart is an editor, a professor, and a political commentator for CNN.¹⁹ Beinart was once touted as a great supporter of liberal Zionism, but he has begun to turn his back on Zionism altogether in recent years. His most recent published work contains two articles I sourced from, where Beinart claims that a two-state solution is no longer viable and advocates for the Palestinian right of return. I chose to share his opinions, not because I agree with them, but because I think they are becoming more popular among the liberal American Jewish community and need to be understood and discussed. Dyme and I were fortunate to hear directly from Beinart when he was the guest lecturer in our “Crisis of Zionism” course.

¹⁸ "Yehuda Amichai." Poetry Foundation. <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/yehuda-amichai>.

¹⁹ "Peter Beinart." Wikipedia. February 28, 2022. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Peter_Beinart.

Conversation Summary

On Yehuda Amichai's Poetry

After a quick introduction, Ben and I began our discussion on Yehuda Amichai's poetry. I read Amichai's poem "Sonnet," which evokes the intergeneration trauma of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict. Ben reminded me that when we visited the Kibbutz Kfar Aza on Israel's border with Gaza, we learned that they do not experience post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Instead, this community faces ongoing trauma that never lets up. In reflecting on this community, I shared two of their stories that impacted me. We learned that they have to reach the bomb shelters approximately ten seconds after a siren. This means that toddlers learn to respond to sirens before they learn to walk by raising their hands in the air so someone can carry them to safety. Yet this community continues to embrace each other and their free-spirited kibbutz lifestyle, and it continues to draw in new members. Ben and I discussed how this community felt a real sense of pride for their home and each other. Some of the members even shared stories about how they used to be friends with their neighbors in Gaza. They hoped to rekindle those friendships in the future.

In reflecting further on the theme of intergenerational trauma, Ben mentions the sad reality that this poem could be read a few generations from now and still be applicable. I spoke about how difficult I imagined raising children in a state with compulsory military service must be. I also considered the struggle Palestinian families face living in a place where they have little control over their circumstances. Ben read a definition of trauma which states, "Trauma is the response to a deeply distressing or disturbing event that overwhelms an individual's ability to cope, causes feelings of helplessness, diminishes their sense of self and

their ability to feel the full range of emotions and experiences.”²⁰ He suggests that experiencing the inevitable trauma of this conflict and watching the rest of your loved ones experience it must make one feel helpless.

Understanding that everyone encounters trauma in Israel and the Palestinian territories shifted our discussion to the fear many Israelis and Palestinians have of each other. I shared a story about a Palestinian mother I met who was grateful to have experiences with American Jews through Encounter Programs. Before participating in the program, her only experiences with Jews were with uniformed Israeli Defense Force (IDF) soldiers. She shared how she wished her children could meet Jews who were not IDF soldiers in their neighborhoods. It made us a little sad thinking about the lack of relationship between Palestinians and Israelis outside of the conflict.

In the second poem I selected, “Jerusalem,” Amichai’s words convey the illusion that Israelis and Palestinians attempt to make their neighbors believe that they are happy when in fact, they are all exhausted from the generations-long conflict. Ben was sad to think about that illusion they created for each other. However, it brought him back to our conversation about how Israelis and Palestinians are often conditioned to fear each other. Then I reflected on Amichai’s use of the word enemy in describing his neighbors. The word enemy is more charged than fear and includes anger and hatred toward the other. Ben and I reflected a desire for Israelis and Palestinians to see each other as people. Instead, they often distill the other down to a single part of their identity.

²⁰ Alex. "What Is Trauma? - Definition, Symptoms, Responses, Types & Therapy." Unyte Integrated Listening. February 17, 2022. <https://integratedlistening.com/what-is-trauma/#:~:text=Trauma%20is%20the%20response%20to,is%20pervasive%20throughout%20the%20world>.

In a more uplifting moment of this conversation, Ben shared his hope for change through the success of Palestinian-Israelis in government. He was referring to the Join List, a coalition of Arab-Israeli parties in the Knesset, who at times have been successful in coalescing with left-wing Jewish-majority parties. Then we spoke about Combatants for Peace, an organization that “works towards a two-state solution in the 1967 borders, or any other mutually agreed-upon solution that will allow both Israelis and Palestinians to live in freedom, security, democracy and dignity in their homeland.”²¹ We concluded this section conveying our belief that there is a great need for more cooperation among Israelis and Palestinians on social and governmental echelons.

On Beinart's Yavne Article

I began this section by giving a bit of background on the American journalist, Peter Beinart. Most notably, his views have shifted from liberal Zionism to far-left ideology over the past few years. Then Ben selected one of the quotes from Beinart’s article, *Yavne: A Jewish Case For Equality in Israel-Palestine*, published in July 2020. Ben read a quote where Beinart calls the two-state solution plan a failure. Beinart calls on “liberal Zionists to abandon the goal of Jewish–Palestinian separation and embrace the goal of Jewish–Palestinian equality.”²²

After reading, Ben said he was surprised the first time he read Beinart’s article when it was published. Ben still believes strongly in a two-state solution. While I also appreciate the idea of the two-state solution, I pushed back on Ben’s conviction echoing Beinart’s comments

²¹ "Homepage." Combatants for Peace. January 02, 2022. <https://cfpeace.org/>.

²² "Yavne: A Jewish Case for Equality in Israel-Palestine." Jewish Currents. <https://jewishcurrents.org/yavne-a-jewish-case-for-equality-in-israel-palestine>.

about the problematic nature of Jewish settlements in the West Bank. The settlements have completely changed the borders and landscape of the West Bank, to the point that a two-state solution would only work if West Bank settlers agreed to live in a Palestinian state. Ben reminded me that without a two-state solution, a Palestinian right of return would likely remove any possibility of a Jewish majority holding power. His remarks helped me think outside of the box. Ben reminded me that a two-state future could include redrawing the borders entirely. In the end, we agreed that Israel as the Jewish state is an integral part of our Jewish experience and identities.

Ben shared a story about one of the speakers from our “Crisis of Zionism” course who was proposing a one-state solution, knowing that it would threaten Jewish sovereignty. When the speaker was asked how he thought Jewish might respond to losing Jewish sovereignty in the land of Israel, he sidestepped the question and moved on. For Ben, myself, and many other Jews worldwide, Jewish sovereignty in the state of Israel is non-negotiable.

We closed this part of the discussion by reflecting on the importance of feeling seen and accepted the way we do when we are in Israel. We both grew up in small midwestern towns that were predominantly Christian. In school, we were expected to sing and play Christian music for December concerts. There were Christmas decorations and trees in most public areas of our towns, including government buildings. Living in a place where you are not the majority can be exhausting, and in Israel, we learned what it felt like to be one of many.

On Beinart's Right of Return Article

In Beinart's article *Teshuvah: A Jewish Case for Palestinian Refugee Return*, published in May 2021, he supports claims that call into question some of the methods of pre-state Zionist leaders used to remove Palestinians from their villages. After reading these claims, Ben and I discussed one of the most painful learning experiences we had during our HUC studies in Israel.

On this trip, we visited a beautiful forest. Everyone was in awe at its tall green trees and the bright sunlight shining through them. Our awe was crushed when our Arab-Israeli tour guide began to share his story. His family lived on that land for generations, but they were forced out during Israel's War of Independence. The village was eventually demolished, and the Jewish National Fund (JNF) planted trees in its place. I reflected on the deeply mixed feelings this experience caused me. Ben and I both grew up donating money to the JNF to plant trees in Israel. We had no idea that some of those trees were being planted on top of demolished homes. This experience complicated our perspectives on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Ben also brought up an exercise that his class did after visiting this forest. They were asked to rank in order of personal importance regarding Israel; sovereignty, democracy, and homeland. Ben said it was particularly challenging to organize the three after such an emotional experience.

On our Responsibility as Israel Educators

In conclusion to this conversation, Ben and I discussed the following two questions regarding Israel. “What do you think we should be teaching in Jewish institutions? Is it our job to present all sides?” Ben believes that it is his responsibility to teach nuanced perspectives of Israel. He said, “of course he would love for his students to care about Israel; and there is no surer way to get a student to completely step away from everything than to only teach them a part of the truth and later find out that they were lied to.” I echoed all of what Ben had to say. We both believe in giving our students all the information to help them form their own opinions. Ben and I ended by sharing our hopes to continue teaching both the good and bad parts of Israeli history and modern Israeli society.

Resources for Listeners:

- [Encounter Programs](#)
- [Letters to my Palestinian Neighbor](#)
- [Combatants for Peace](#)
- [Disturbing the Peace](#), a documentary about Combatants for Peace.
- [Blue Box](#), a documentary on JNF’s involvement in pre-state and early state Israel
- [Naomi Shemer’s Lu Y’hi](#)

Episode 3: Unprecedented Growth in Antisemitism

Guest Profile

To join me for this episode, I invited Stefanie Greene, a HUC cantorial student working for Hillel Jewish University Center of Pittsburgh, and who will be ordained this May on the New York campus.

Stefanie Greene grew up in New Jersey but spent her most formative years in Highland Park, Illinois, and the Chicagoland area. She received her Bachelor's of Music at the University of Rochester in 2011 and completed additional graduate studies in Choral Music Education at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign and in Vocal Performance at North Park University (IL). Stefanie has worked at several congregations as a cantorial intern at Beth Emet the Free Synagogue (Evanston, IL), Temple Beth El (Jersey City, NJ), and Stephen Wise Free Synagogue (NYC), and most recently at Temple Ohav Shalom (Pittsburgh, PA). She currently serves as the Senior Jewish Educator at the Edward and Rose Berman Hillel Jewish University Center of Pittsburgh, the first cantor to serve in this capacity in Hillel International.

I chose Greene for this conversation because in her time working for Hillel Jewish University Center of Pittsburgh, she has been helping students and the community grapple with antisemitism on their college campuses and processes the aftermath of the attack on the Tree of Life Synagogue. Also, as she mentions in her bio, Greene is the first (almost) cantor to serve as a Senior Jewish Educator for Hillel. She plans to stay in that position following

ordination. It was important to include the voice of a cantor along with my rabbinic colleagues who joined me for the other two episodes because cantors are as qualified as rabbis to teach on this stuff!

Why study these texts?

The first set of texts I chose for this episode includes stories about antisemitic incidents that Jewish students have faced on US college campuses. We typically get these stories in bits and pieces in news articles and through statistical research, but data does not necessarily convey the pain that Jewish students are left to deal with. Hearing the firsthand accounts of the variety of antisemitic experiences teens and young adults face helps listeners build a personal and emotional connection to these stories.

The second set of texts focuses heavily on data collected by the Anti Defamation League (ADL), whose mission is “to stop the defamation of the Jewish people and to secure justice and fair treatment to all.”²³ In the ADL - Hillel campus survey, we looked at statistics about how welcome Jewish students feel on various college campuses. We also looked at more stories, including one from a student who was made to feel uncomfortable sharing support for the Jewish community and Israel in the classroom.

The third set of texts comes from an article about cantorial student Stefanie Greene’s Hillel community in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. In addressing the rise of antisemitism during our studies at HUC, it was necessary to discuss the attack on the Jewish congregations who

²³ "Our Mission." Anti-Defamation League. <https://www.adl.org/who-we-are/our-mission>.

practiced out of the Tree of life synagogue. Both Greene and some of her students are quoted in this article.

Conversation summary

On the Framing

While it was unnecessary to include a summary of the framing for the first two episodes, something particularly eerie occurred the morning that Stefanie and I recorded our conversation. We recorded on the morning of January 15th, 2022, the same morning that a rabbi and members of Congregation Beth Israel in Colleyville, Texas were taken hostage. Since Stefanie and I did not learn about the hostage situation until after recording, I added a disclaimer so listeners would understand our perspectives at the time of the conversation.

I started our discussion by sharing a news story published the day before, on January 14, 2022. The story was about Sasha, a Jewish student at Temple University who faced antisemitism from her roommate, her rowing coaches, and the administrators in charge of her formal hearing on the matter.²⁴ After summarizing Sasha's story, I told Stefanie that I wanted to bring it to our conversation because it shows how antisemitism can exist in multiple levels of a student's experience. Stefanie reflected on the part of Sasha's story where her roommate asks her for money and tells her it is because she heard Jews have lots of money. Stefanie took this moment to talk about the history and etymology of antisemitism. She said, "in order to assimilate, Jews were asked to be the merchants for Christians, which is where this trope of 'Jews have all the money' comes from." Stefanie then spoke about how antisemitism remains prevalent today, such as through infographics on social media.

²⁴ "Temple U. Student Plans Transfer over Antisemitic Harassment." The Forward. January 14, 2022. <https://forward.com/news/480837/temple-university-antisemitism-rowing-team-harassment-philadelphia/>.

As an educator and mentor of Jewish college students, Stefanie pondered how clergy can act as a pastoral and educational presence during acts of antisemitism. I shared a story about Rabbi Sam Spector of Congregation Kol Ami in Salt Lake City, Utah, in response to her question. Rabbi Spector was called on by a Utah tech company, Entrata, after firing one of their founders for sending an antisemitic conspiracy theory about covid-19 to several CEOs in the area. Entrata's board brought Rabbi Spector in to teach them more about antisemitism and find out what they could do to support the Jewish community.

Stefanie brought the conversation back to her college students and said that she feels her work is significant because “we catch these students at a time in their lives where they are the most open-minded and the most social. It is a time to make an impact and an impression on them.” She shared a story about one of her students who came to her concerned that their schools' cheer “hail to Pitt” might reflect the phrase “heil Hitler.” The student told Stefanie that she wasn't sure she would feel comfortable participating in that cheer or even hearing it after making the connection.

We shifted our discussion to our own life experiences with antisemitism. While Stefanie does not remember experiencing antisemitism as an undergrad at the University of Rochester, she did experience covert antisemitism during her music education studies at the University of Illinois Champagne Urbana (U of I). Most music conservatories, according to Stefanie, teach classical music from a very Christian perspective. Her music history classes began with learning about Catholic mass. She shared her frustration that there is no education around

Jewish music or Jewish modes. What was even more disappointing was to hear that Stefanie could not participate in High Holy Days during her time as a student at U of I because professors refused to award her excused absences to attend prayer services.

Her story about not missing class for High Holy Days reminded me of the antisemitism I faced growing up in a small Northwest Indiana school system. My parents had to get a signed permission slip from our rabbi to “prove” we attended services every year. Our rabbi thought it was ridiculous, so he would sign it and tell us to do whatever we wanted every time. We always attend services, but he would have signed it even if we chose to spend the day at home or traveling. I also shared about a time I had a classmate in elementary school try to connect my freckles into a Star of David. I didn’t even realize it was antisemitic until years later.

Stefanie replied that the question of going to class or going to pray for the holidays is still a big one for many Jewish college students. Specifically, her science and mathematics students are afraid that missing classes will set them behind. While they might get an excused absence with a letter from the Hille rabbis, professors do not always make it easy for them to catch up on missed materials.

I shared more about my own experience and some of my brothers too. As a freshman at Ball State University, my brother excitedly hung his Israeli flag on his dorm wall above his bed and went to class. When he returned from class, he noticed that his roommate had hung a nazi flag above his bed on the opposite wall. While the dorm resident made his roommate

take the flag down, my brother decided it was better not to sleep in the same room as this guy and moved into a different room.

Then I spoke about a BDS (boycotts, divestments, sanctions) campaign that led to antisemitism at the University of Indianapolis a few years after I graduated. I was still living in town and active in the Jewish community, so I participated in the Indianapolis Jewish communities plea to keep the BDS resolution from passing in the student senate. It had already caused antisemitic graffiti on campus. The meeting was also held on Shabbat morning, making it impossible for halachically observant Jews to attend. The university administration refused to work with the students and Jewish community to reschedule it for a more appropriate time.

Stefanie shared about a great resource, Instagram account @JewishOnCampus. This @JewishOnCampus posts stories about antisemitism on college campuses across the country. In December, they posited a BDS resolution passed by the City University of New York Law School student government. They called to cut all ties with Jewish organizations affiliated with the University or its students, such as Hillel. They did this because they assumed that all Jews hold the same views about Israel and that Jewish ideology is incompatible with their law school. Conflating Israeli politics with American Judaism to cancel them both is antisemitic. Stefanie shared that she hopes to find opportunities to teach about the difference between legitimate criticism of Israel and claims about Israel rooted in antisemitic conspiracies.

On Jewish Student's Stories about Antisemitism on Campus

When we finally transitioned into the text sheet, I read one of the stories from the first article I provided entitled, *Local college students, face varying degrees of antisemitism on campus*. After telling fellow students that some of the January Sixth Capitol Riot protesters were neo-nazis, Jewish student Sadie faced antisemitic slurs. In response, Stefanie shared that some of the students quoted in the articles I shared are student leaders in Hillel. She said that many of them have faced challenges based on antisemitism during their time in college.

I transitioned our conversation to statistics from the ADL-Hillel Campus Antisemitism Survey. We looked at a graph titled *Experiences on Campus*. We learned that being Jewish on campus, for many students, means having others assume your views on Israel and Israeli politics and conflate Jewish religion with Israeli politics. Some students did not even feel comfortable appearing visibly Jewish on campus by wearing *kippot* or Star of David necklaces. I also shared a quote from this survey report which claimed hostility around Israel had become so tense that she couldn't even share her views in the classroom without being ostracized. For me, this brought up fear for free speech in education. It is a profound problem when college students cannot openly share their opinions that disagree with the mainstream, and even more so if they are rooted in the person's religious and cultural tradition. Stefanie then reflected on how many Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) programs on college campuses fail to include Jewish students and awareness of antisemitism in their scope of work. We discussed how important it is for college administrators and professors to get educated on antisemitism to support their Jewish students and to keep them from accidentally perpetuating it.

On the Aftermath of the Attack on the Tree Of Life Synagogue

Stefanie and I were second-year students serving in congregational pulpits when the attack occurred in October of 2018. We began this portion of our conversation by reflecting on our experience as new community leaders.

Stefanie worked for a synagogue in Jersey City that year and didn't see the news until she got home from Shabbat morning services. She said when she read the news, she felt gutted. In the moment, she soothed her pain and shock by playing Jewish songs of peace and protest. In the weeks and months after the attack, Stefane said she began to reflect on how the attack added a new element to our role as clergy. Suddenly we became part of the security team. Our entire staff has to undergo active shooter training just in case.

In October 2018, I had two different jobs. I was a religious school teacher in Cincinnati and a student rabbi in Northern Michigan. The weekend of the attack, I was working locally. Our religious school had prepared a special lesson around bullying. Students spent the day learning what it means to be an upstander. While many people in the community wanted to reflect on what happened, a few families did not want their children to know. We kept quiet about the attack for most of the morning, but when I was in a classroom with my teens, it became necessary to create a space for them to process.

The following weekend I visited my community in Northern Michigan. The interfaith community was incredibly supportive of their Jewish neighbors. It was the largest turnout I

had witnessed at one of their Shabbat services. In the months following the attack, I sat with the new safety and security board committee to help reshape their policies. We shared how exhausting and scary it was those first few months to lead services from the pulpit while watching the door for possible threats.

On Stefanie's role with Pittsburgh Hillel Students

In her role as Senior Jewish Educator, Stefanie was part of the team that organized memorial programming for students around the date of the attack. The students she served in the 2021-2022 school year were freshmen when the 2018 attack occurred. Stefanie said that in the days leading up to the anniversary, she and some of the other Hillel staff met with students one on one to help them process their traumatic memories. She also co-facilitated a healing havdalah service that week for the student community. We ended our discussion by sharing our prayers for the Pittsburgh Jewish community and all those affected by the attack.

Resources:

- Instagram: [@Jewishoncampus](#)
- [The 10-27 Healing Partnership](#)

Section Three: Text Studies

Episode 1: Generations of Sexual Misconduct in American Jewish Institutions

Guidelines to ensure respectful listening and conversation:

- Speak from personal experience. No one is expected to represent an entire group.
- “Doubt what you know, be curious about what you don’t know.”
- Listen with resilience, reply with questions rather than criticisms
- Explore the meanings of emotionally charged terms that have multiple meanings and connotations for different people
- Speak about uncertainties, complexities, and gray areas in your thinking, as well as what you know for sure

Conversations can be marked difficult for a variety of reasons. Sometimes there is no clear resolution to an issue, or multiple competing resolutions cause further disagreement. Some problems are avoided because they are considered taboo and might cause discomfort. Others cause us to face the things we fear the most. The most challenging discussions require us to confront our own biases and how they affect our communities. The objective of this text study is to engage in conversation about a complex topic. The intent is NOT to solve the problem.

Organizational psychologist Adam Grant writes, “When it comes to our own knowledge and opinions, we often favor **feeling** right over **being** right... As we think and talk, we often slip into the mindsets of three different professions: preachers, prosecutors, and politicians. In each of these modes, we take on a particular identity and use a distinct set of tools. We go into preacher mode when our sacred beliefs are in jeopardy. We enter prosecutor mode when we recognize flaws in other people’s reasoning. We shift into politician mode when we are seeking to win over an audience. The risk is that we become so wrapped up in preaching that we are right, prosecuting others who are wrong, and politicking for support that we don’t bother to rethink our own views.”²⁵ Grant suggests rethinking our views requires us to act more like scientists. As a scientist, **“You are expected to doubt what you know, be curious about what you don’t know, and update your views based on new data.”**²⁶ You are encouraged to explore these texts through that scientific mindset and the following questions:

- What do you find surprising?
- Which terms do you consider emotionally charged? Why?
- What is hard for you to hear? Why?
- What new information can you find in this discussion?
- Which of your views are challenged and which are confirmed by this discussion?

²⁵ Grant, Adam. *Think Again: The Power of Knowing What You Don't Know*. Random House Large Print, 2021. pp25-26.

²⁶ Grant, Adam. pp28.

Statistics

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| <p>CDC’s Division of Violence Prevention: as of 2015, approximately 1 in 5 women, and 1 in 14 men in the United States have reported a completed or attempted rape at some point in their lifetime.²⁷</p> | <p>Darkness to Light - to End Child Sex Abuse: as of 2015, about one in 10 children are sexually abused before their 18th birthday.²⁸</p> |
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Excerpts from- “Investigation- How Jewish Youth Groups Are Breeding A Toxic Sexual Culture For Teens”²⁹ | July 13, 2021

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| <p>“Accounts of sexual harassment and assault in these spaces [American Jewish Youth Groups] are pervasive, and often go unreported or ignored. As of the publishing of this article, dozens of young American Jews have shared their stories of feeling pressure to engage in sexual activity to witnessing or experiencing full-fledged sexual assault. At least 50 of these stories allegedly took place at events hosted by the youth groups mentioned in this article [NFTY, BBYO, & USY] (other stories take place at camps, or in other Jewish spaces geared towards youth).”</p> | <p>“Nearly every current and former USYer interviewed within this investigation was able to instantly rattle off all the numerical values of the unofficial ‘point system,’ a competition that has been around for at least three decades, circulating informally among participants, in which youth group members score points via hookups. [NFTY and BBYO participants reported similar ‘point systems’ in their youth groups] This pressure permeates all events. Jacob Finkelman, a former BBYO participant, described the culture as ‘Greek life for kids.’”</p> |
| <p>“For many teens, their experiences at youth group events are their first forays into sexual relationships and are formative in their expectations for their romantic and sexual futures. According to interviews, youth groups are not providing Jewish youth with models of what healthy, consensual relationships should look like. Rather, these cultural experiences are leading teens to believe that relationships built around power and pressure are normal. Jewish youth organizations are part of a historic communal effort to inundate children with lessons about the importance of having their own Jewish children. Some of these lessons on being fruitful and multiplying come from parents and grandparents at home, but others come from institutions dedicated to the cause of preserving Jewish continuity.”</p> | |

²⁷ "Infographic about Sexual Violence Prevention|Violence Prevention Publications|Violence Prevention|Injury Center|CDC." Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. February 05, 2021. <https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/communicationresources/infographics/SV.html>.

²⁸ "Child Sexual Abuse Statistics." Darkness to Light. February 06, 2020. <https://www.d2l.org/child-sexual-abuse/statistics/>.

²⁹ "Investigation: How Jewish Youth Groups Are Breeding A Toxic Sexual Culture For Teens." New Voices. September 15, 2021. <https://newvoices.org/2021/07/13/investigation-how-jewish-youth-groups-are-breeding-a-toxic-sexual-culture-for-teens/>.

Stories from the above article and Instagram account @Jews4EmpoweredConsent:³⁰

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| <p>“At about 13 years old, I remember my counselor, probably 19 years old, teaching two of the more popular girls how to give blow jobs, in the cubby room of our bunk. I specifically remember her asking them to bring a banana so she could demonstrate later at night when most of us were asleep. I remember clear as day, thinking, “We are way too young for this!” Class of 2007</p> | |
| <p>“When I was a [counselor in training] there was a big party on the last night of camp for the staff. Everyone, including myself, was very drunk. I ended up hooking up with a guy (definitely too drunk to consent) while the entire camp staff watched through a window and chanted his name. I later found out that he and his friends had essentially planned the whole thing and set me up to hook up with him. I was the one who was told by directors that my behavior was unacceptable and that my future at camp was at risk due to my “poor decisions.” Class of 2010</p> | <p>“Maya walked into Shabbat dinner at BBYO’s international convention in February 2020 with a group of friends and began scouting out a place to sit among the gathering’s 6,000 teens. They found spots at a table, and Maya introduced herself to the boy from Texas seated next to her. A few minutes later, as Shabbat services began, his hands were on her thighs, between her legs, and groping her breasts. She asked him to stop; he did not. When Maya was able to extricate herself from the table, one friend asked if she knew the boy. She said no. ‘That’s just what happens,’ her friend replied. ‘We shouldn’t have sat with strangers.’”</p> |

³⁰ Jews 4 Empowered Consent, *Instagram*, <https://www.instagram.com/jews4empoweredconsent/?hl=en>.

Excerpts from- “Report of Investigation into Allegations of Misconduct at Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion”³¹ | November 3, 2021

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| <p>“The most prevalent comment we heard was of a “good old boys” mindset across all of HUC’s campuses.”</p> | <p>“A student stated that in the late 1980s, a faculty member reached his hand up a student’s skirt and stroked her legs.”</p> |
| <p>Another student reported that a professor harassed a classmate by opening his door to her while completely naked, making sexual innuendos, and attempting to touch her.</p> | <p>Students in the 1970s and 1980s reported that one faculty member intentionally stood close to women and inappropriately touched them, particularly in the elevator, and attempted to kiss female students.</p> |
| <p>Other female students from the 1980s through the present reported incidents of faculty members forcibly kissing and/or groping students, offering to give a female student massages, staring at female students’ chests, or looking down their blouses.</p> | <p>Some students, including more recent students, reported that certain professors engaged in more subtle conduct, such as trying to spend time alone with students and asking them overly personal questions that made them feel uncomfortable and as if they were being “groomed.”</p> |
| <p>A student from the early 2010s, was staying with a male congregant in connection with her student pulpit assignment. She reportedly woke in the middle of the night to find the congregant standing over her bed, claiming he was “just checking on her.” When the student reported the incident to HUC, she was permitted to not stay with congregants and was told that HUC would not place other students in congregants’ homes, but she told us she later learned HUC continued to do so.</p> | <p>“There were numerous allegations of sexual harassment, ranging in severity from forcible sexual touching to off-colored jokes and comments about breasts and penis size. Numerous students told us that they did not report sexual harassment to faculty or the administration because they feared retaliation.”</p> |

³¹ Morgan Lewis Report

Episode 2: The Israeli-Palestinian Conflict, Poetry on Hardships of the Conflict & Opinions from the Far Left

Guidelines to ensure respectful listening and conversation:

- Speak from personal experience. No one is expected to represent an entire group.
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- Listen with resilience, reply with questions rather than criticisms
- Explore the meanings of emotionally charged terms that have multiple meanings and connotations for different people
- Speak about uncertainties, complexities, and gray areas in your thinking, as well as what you know for sure

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- What do you find surprising?
- Which terms do you consider emotionally charged? Why?
- What is hard for you to hear? Why?
- What new information can you find in this discussion?
- Which of your views are challenged and which are confirmed by this discussion?

³² Grant, Adam. pp25-26.

³³ Grant, Adam. pp28.

Poetry by Yehuda Amichai

Sonnet³⁴

My father fought their war four years or so,
And did not hate or love his enemies.
Already he was forming me, I know,
Daily, out of his tranquilities;

Tranquilities, so few, which he had gleaned
Between the bombs and smoke, for his son's sake,
And put into his ragged knapsack with
The leftovers of my mother's hardening cake.

He gathered with his eyes the nameless dead,
The many dead for my sake unforsaken,
So that I should not die like them in dread,
But love them, seeing them as he saw.
He filled his eyes with them; he was mistaken.
Like them, I must go out to meet my war.

Jerusalem³⁵

On a roof in the Old City
Laundry hanging in the late afternoon sunlight:
The white sheet of a woman who is my enemy,
The towel of a man who is my enemy,
To wipe off the sweat of his brow.

In the sky of the Old City
A kite.
At the other end of the string,
A child
I can't see
Because of the wall.

We have put up many flags,
They have put up many flags.
To make us think that they're happy.
To make them think that we're happy.

³⁴ Yehuda Amichai, Yehuda Amichai. "Sonnet ('My Father Fought...') by Yehuda Amichai |..." *Poetry Foundation*, Poetry Foundation, www.poetryfoundation.org/poetrymagazine/browse?contentId=27704.

³⁵ Chazan, Barry. *Israel: Voices From Within*. Third Place Publications, 2020. pp112.

Excerpts from Peter Beinart’s *Yavne: A Jewish Case For Equality in Israel-Palestine*³⁶ | July 7, 2020

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| <p>“Questioning Israel’s existence as a Jewish state is a different order of offense—akin to spitting in the face of people I love and betraying institutions that give my life meaning and joy. Besides, Jewish statehood has long been precious to me, too. So I’ve respected certain red lines. Unfortunately, reality has not. With each passing year, it has become clearer that Jewish statehood includes permanent Israeli control of the West Bank. With each new election, irrespective of which parties enter the government, Israel has continued subsidizing Jewish settlement in a territory in which Palestinians lack citizenship, due process, free movement, and the right to vote for the government that dominates their lives. Israel has built highways for those Jewish settlers so they can travel easily across the Green Line— which rarely appears on Israeli maps—while their Palestinian neighbors languish at checkpoints.”</p> | <p>“The painful truth is that the project to which liberal Zionists like myself have devoted ourselves for decades—a state for Palestinians separated from a state for Jews—has failed. The traditional two-state solution no longer offers a compelling alternative to Israel’s current path. It risks becoming, instead, a way of camouflaging and enabling that path. It is time for liberal Zionists to abandon the goal of Jewish–Palestinian separation and embrace the goal of Jewish–Palestinian equality.”</p> |
| <p>“The Israeli government rules in different ways in different parts of the land between the Mediterranean and the Jordan, but everywhere, it rules. That includes the West Bank, where the Israeli army—and the army of no other state—can arrest anyone, anywhere, at any time, including top officials of the PA. It also includes Gaza, whose residents can’t import milk, export tomatoes, travel abroad, or receive foreign visitors without Israel’s (and to a lesser extent, Egypt’s) approval.”</p> | |

³⁶ “Yavne: A Jewish Case for Equality in Israel-Palestine.” *Jewish Currents*, jewishcurrents.org/yavne-a-jewish-case-for-equality-in-israel-palestine.

Excerpts from Peter Beinart's: *Teshuvah: A Jewish Case for Palestinian Refugee Return*³⁷ | May 11, 2021

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| <p>“In Jewish discourse, the refusal to forget the past evokes deep pride... Why is dreaming of return laudable for Jews but pathological for Palestinians? ... many prominent Palestinians have alluded to the bitter irony of Jews telling another people to give up on their homeland and assimilate in foreign lands. We, of all people, should understand how insulting that demand is. Jewish leaders keep insisting that, to achieve peace, Palestinians must forget the Nakba, the catastrophe they endured in 1948. But it is more accurate to say that peace will come when Jews remember. The better we remember why Palestinians left, the better we will understand why they deserve the chance to return.”</p> | |
| <p>“Even for many Jews passionately opposed to Israeli policies in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, supporting Palestinian refugee return remains taboo. But, morally, this distinction makes little sense. If it is wrong to hold Palestinians as non-citizens under military law, and wrong to impose a blockade that denies them the necessities of life, it is surely also wrong to expel them and prevent them from returning home. For decades, liberal Jews have parried this moral argument with a pragmatic one: Palestinian refugees should return only to the West Bank and Gaza, regardless of whether that is where they are from, as part of a two-state solution that gives both Palestinians and Jews a country of their own. But with every passing year, as Israel further entrenches its control over all the land between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea, this supposedly realistic alternative grows more detached from reality. There will be no viable, sovereign, Palestinian state to which refugees can go.”</p> | <p>“The establishment Jewish narrative omits that the vast majority of Palestinians forced from their homes committed no violence at all. In <i>Army of Shadows</i>, Hebrew University historian Hillel Cohen notes that, ‘Most of the Palestinian Arabs who took up arms were organized in units that defended their villages and homes, or sometimes a group of villages.’ They ventured beyond them ‘only in extremely rare cases.’ He adds that, frequently, ‘local Arab representatives had approached their Jewish neighbors with requests to conclude non-aggression pacts.’ When such efforts failed, Palestinian villages and towns often surrendered in the face of Zionist might. In most cases, their residents were expelled anyway. Their presence was intolerable not because they had personally threatened Jews but because they threatened the demography of a Jewish state.”</p> |

³⁷ “Teshuvah: A Jewish Case for Palestinian Refugee Return.” *Jewish Currents*, jewishcurrents.org/teshuvah-a-jewish-case-for-palestinian-refugee-return.

Episode 3: Unprecedented Growth in Antisemitism

Guidelines to ensure respectful listening and conversation:

- Speak from personal experience. No one is expected to represent an entire group.
- “Doubt what you know, be curious about what you don’t know.”
- Listen with resilience, reply with questions rather than criticisms
- Explore the meanings of emotionally charged terms that have multiple meanings and connotations for different people
- Speak about uncertainties, complexities, and gray areas in your thinking, as well as what you know for sure

Conversations can be marked difficult for a variety of reasons. Sometimes there is no clear resolution to an issue, or multiple competing resolutions cause further disagreement. Some problems are avoided because they are considered taboo and might cause discomfort. Others cause us to face the things we fear the most. The most challenging discussions require us to confront our own biases and how they affect our communities. The objective of this text study is to engage in conversation about a complex topic. The intent is NOT to solve the problem.

Organizational psychologist Adam Grant writes, “When it comes to our own knowledge and opinions, we often favor **feeling** right over **being** right... As we think and talk, we often slip into the mindsets of three different professions: preachers, prosecutors, and politicians. In each of these modes, we take on a particular identity and use a distinct set of tools. We go into preacher mode when our sacred beliefs are in jeopardy. We enter prosecutor mode when we recognize flaws in other people’s reasoning. We shift into politician mode when we are seeking to win over an audience. The risk is that we become so wrapped up in preaching that we are right, prosecuting others who are wrong, and politicking for support that we don’t bother to rethink our own views.”³⁸ Grant suggests rethinking our views requires us to act more like scientists. As a scientist, **“You are expected to doubt what you know, be curious about what you don’t know, and update your views based on new data.”**³⁹ You are encouraged to explore these texts through that scientific mindset and the following questions:

- What do you find surprising?
- Which terms do you consider emotionally charged? Why?
- What is hard for you to hear? Why?
- What new information can you find in this discussion?
- Which of your views are challenged and which are confirmed by this discussion?

³⁸ Grant, Adam. pp25-26.

³⁹ Grant, Adam. pp28.

Local college students face varying degrees of antisemitism on campus⁴⁰ | December 21, 2021

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| Delilah Hollander, a 19-year-old freshman at Chatham University, said she hasn't encountered any overt antisemitism on campus but that she's been treated differently because of her ties to Israel, where she spent a gap year before college. Hollander believes her online presence initially precluded relationship-building on campus. She said classmates avoided her at the beginning of the semester and that their hesitancy was hurtful. | "Sadie Hilf, a student of Grove City College, stated that her campus is 'very pro-Israel.' However, she did face an antisemitic experience after the January 6 attack on the US Capitol. Hilf reported that she tried to explain to another student how neo-Nazis were among those rioting in D.C. The conversation quickly spiraled, and during a subsequent mediation with the chaplain, the student called Hilf a 'kike.'" |
| "In the last year, a third of Jewish college students say they've experienced antisemitism, according to a survey by Hillel International and the Anti-Defamation League." | |

U.S. college leaders must confront anti-Semitism on their campuses⁴¹

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| "In New Mexico, a Jewish student was jumped and beaten by attackers shouting anti-Semitic and anti-Israel remarks. At the University of Chicago, Jewish students leaving Hillel after Shabbat dinner on a Friday evening were accosted by a person repeatedly yelling "F--- Jews" while filming the incident on a phone. A popular Instagram account has been sharing hundreds of instances of hate-filled content by fellow students and even professors." | These past few weeks have sharply focused attention on several challenges Jewish students face. Perhaps most significant is the now-dominant hostile narrative connecting U.S. racial-justice imperatives with the Palestinian struggle against Israel. This ideological linkage has become pervasive on campus. Jewish students across the country have been shamed and marginalized in spaces ranging from student government to sexual-violence support groups for their support of a Jewish homeland. This is deeply problematic both because it turns Israel into a caricatured stand-in for white racism in the United States and forces Jewish students to disavow any connection with Israel as the price for joining in racial-justice and other progressive work on campus." |
| "Students have recently witnessed a wave of official statements by university departments making inflammatory assertions about Israeli 'genocide' and 'ethnic cleansing,' and asserting that there is no other perspective on the conflict even worthy of a hearing." | |

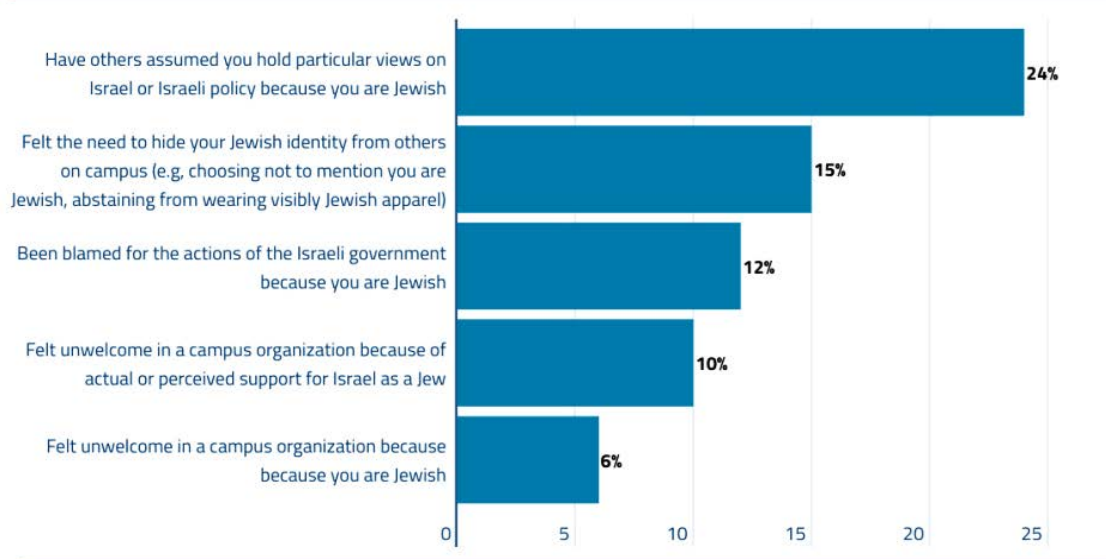
⁴⁰ Reinherz, Adam, et al. "Local College Students Face Varying Degrees of Antisemitism on Campus." *The Pittsburgh Jewish Chronicle*, 21 Dec. 2021, jewishchronicle.timesofisrael.com/local-college-students-face-varying-degrees-of-antisemitism-on-campus/.

⁴¹ Rotenberg, Mark. "U.S. College Leaders Must Confront Anti-Semitism on Their Campuses." *Default*, 25 Aug. 2021, www.hillel.org/about/news-views/news-views---blog/news-and-views/2021/08/25/u.s.-college-leaders-must-confront-anti-semitism-on-their-campuses.

The ADL-Hillel Campus Antisemitism Survey: 2021 ⁴²

Challenges Jewish Students experience on Campus even when they feel generally welcome.

Experiences on Campus



“One time, I sat next to someone in my political science class and I put my phone on the table with an “I Celebrate Chanukah” sticker on the case. The person next to me pulled out his laptop with a Confederate flag sticker, looked at my phone case, and moved across the room. Ever since then, I try not to show my Judaism.” –Student at a large southern university

“Expressing support for the Jewish community or Israel is immediately met with ostracizing and harassment to the point of not being able to talk about it in class.” –Student at a large northeastern university

“I used to be more vocal about my Jewishness. I’m worried people will stereotype me and assume I support Israel’s action because I’m Jewish. To prevent this I wrote on my dorm door whiteboard ‘Jews for a Free Palestine.’ I worry that the legitimate and real racial trauma of Jewish families is ignored because they are now perceived as white and therefore seen as complete recipients of American cultural hegemony with family lines of privilege that are untainted by systematic disenfranchisement, murder and abuse.” –Student at a small midwestern liberal arts college

⁴² “The ADL-Hillel Campus Antisemitism Survey: 2021.” *Anti-Defamation League*, www.adl.org/hillel-campus-survey-2021#introduction.

Hillel JUC commemorates Pittsburgh synagogue shooting⁴³

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| <p>“There is no Hebrew word for history... That’s what Dan Marcus, executive director of Hillel Jewish University Center, told students at a Havdalah service marking the third <i>yahrzeit</i> of the victims of the Pittsburgh synagogue shooting. The word for memory, <i>zachar</i>, is used instead, he said, and it is a Jewish tradition for people to share their own experiences of a given event and how it affected them, relying on each other for support and healing.”</p> | <p>Students from the University of Pittsburgh and Carnegie Mellon University gathered at the Hillel building on Saturday evening, Oct. 23, for the commemoration service — which combined traditional Havdalah elements with mourning rituals — led by Hillel’s senior Jewish educator, Stefanie Greene.</p> |
| <p>“‘I was hoping to have a place to feel some solidarity with other people who experienced the shooting, and I got that from tonight,’ said Julia Szwablenest, a senior at Pitt who was on campus as a freshman on Oct. 27, 2018.”</p> | <p>That renewal of connection was one of Stefanie Greene’s main goals in designing the Havdalah service. Greene said, ‘I wanted to create a space for students to both commemorate the lives that were lost and to be able to come and talk about the experience they had with the shooting in their own communities, whether they were here or elsewhere in the country.’</p> |
| <p>“Eva Shterengarts, Hillel’s student president who was a freshman at Pitt in 2018, ‘It was powerful to listen to everyone’s recollections and how impactful the event had been even for those not in Pittsburgh at the time. I felt not only my own grief but the grief of other students who were both in Pittsburgh and in other parts of the country.’ Shterengarts remembers the attack as a defining moment in her Jewish journey through college.”</p> | |

⁴³ Dash, Dionna et. al "Hillel JUC Commemorates Pittsburgh Synagogue Shooting." The Pittsburgh Jewish Chronicle. October 25, 2021. <https://jewishchronicle.timesofisrael.com/hillel-juc-commemorates-pittsburgh-synagogue-shooting/>.

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