

Israel: A Concise History of a Nation Reborn

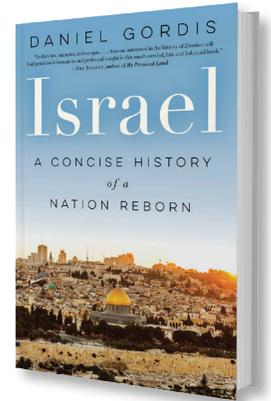
A GUIDE FOR READERS, BOOK CLUBS AND DISCUSSION GROUPS

Written and compiled by Sarah Zisser (sarahyisser@gmail.com)

This guide has been prepared to provide individual readers, book clubs and other groups with leading questions and suggestions of themes to explore as they discuss *Israel: A Concise History of a Nation Reborn*. A series of questions and issues has been prepared for each chapter; towards the conclusion of the document, you will find a set of over-arching topics for discussion that tie together the larger themes of the book.

Wherever references to other online sources appear, we have also provided a QR code so that participants can easily access those sources, during the conversation, using their smartphone or tablet. We also provide standard hyperlinks inside the text.

We wish you an enjoyable and profitable read and discussion.



Introduction: A Grand Human Story

- “I am not the Sultan, and I am not objecting; but if that concentration of the cunningest brains in the world were going to be made in a free country ... I think it would be politic to stop it. It will not be well to let the race find out its strength. If the horses knew theirs, we should not ride anymore” (pg. 2). The book opens by quoting Mark Twain, who expresses both admiration for and suspicion of the Jews. What was it about the Jews that worried Twain? (You might want to trace that theme of complex feelings about the Jews throughout the book and during the course of Israel’s history.)
- “Zionism was in many ways about severing their connections to what had come before them ... Altering their names was a way of saying ‘no more’...it was time for a ‘new Jew,’ a Jewish people reborn.” (pg. 5). In retrospect, does Zionism’s goal of creating a “new Jew” seem to have been wise? In what ways has it been successful? In what ways did it fail to achieve what it sought to do?
- “Zionism was about restoring the Jewish people to the cultural richness that a people has when it lives in its own ancestral homeland, speaks its own languages, charts the course of its own future” (pg. 6). If Zionism was not only about sovereignty, but also about changing the existential condition of the Jew, did it succeed? If you’ve been to Israel, what did you see (or not see) that bolsters your claim?
- “Our focus, as we tell the story of what happened, is to understand why things happened” (pg. 7). Given what has happened to discourse about Israel in our era, why might a focus on “why” be important? Think about the conversations that you and your family and friends have about Israel. Do you ever speak about why the Jews sought a state or what the purpose of Jewish statehood is? Why do you think that is?

Chapter 1: Poetry and Politics—The Jewish Nation Seeks a Home

- This chapter discusses two poems by Chaim Nachman Bialik: “To the Bird” (*El Ha-Tzippor*) and “The Assemblies of Zion” (*Mikra’ei Zion*). One poem expresses Jewish anguish, while the other poem focuses on Jewish hope. When you think of Israel’s experience over the past seven decades, does it feel more like an experience of anguish or of hope? Can you give examples of how today’s Israel reflects each?
- This chapter introduces “*Hatikva*,” first the anthem of Zionism and now Israel’s national anthem. Does “*Hatikva*” embody the old Jew or the new Jew? Were the anthem written to express the “other” kind of Jew, how might it be different? What do you like about Israel’s national anthem? Does anything about it make you uncomfortable?
- In his utopian novel, *Alteneuland*, Theodor Herzl describes the society that would emerge in a Jewish state as a perfected interfaith society (pg. 29). Was that ever the goal of Zionist leaders? Should it have been? How realistic was Herzl’s vision on that score? Why?

Chapter 2: Some Spot of Native Land—The Jewish Roots of Zionism

- The debate between the prophets Jeremiah and Hananiah in the Book of Jeremiah was essentially about whether the Jewish people should strive to return to the Land of Israel as quickly as possible (Hananiah) or get used to life in the Diaspora and wait a long time before returning (Jeremiah)” (pg. 38). As you survey today’s Jewish world, whose view seems wiser? In what ways is Jewish life in the Diaspora richer than in Israel? In what ways is life in Israel richer for Jews than in the Diaspora?
- Thousands of years ago, when the Jews lived in Israel under Greek rule, they recognized that simply living in Israel was not enough. “Living there would have meaning only if it were shaped by the ideals, beliefs, and commitments that had always been central to Jewish life” (pg. 41). How could early Zionist leaders have learned from this example?
- George Eliot wrote, “A human life . . . should be well rooted in some spot of a native land, where it may get the love of tender kinship for the face of earth, . . . for the sounds and accents that haunt it, for whatever will give that early home a familiar unmistakable difference amidst the future widening of knowledge . . . a spot where the definiteness of early memories may be inwrought with affection” (pg. 31). Do you believe that deep, sentimental attachment to a specific place is a universal human attribute? What other peoples in today’s world seem to reflect her viewpoint? If she was right, what fulfills that need for Jews who live outside of Israel?
- Describing Herzl at the First Zionist Congress, one observer said, “Before us rose a marvelous and exalted figure, kingly in bearing and stature, with deep eyes in which could be read quiet majesty and unuttered sorrow...it is a royal scion of the House of David, risen from among the dead, clothed in legend and fantasy and beauty” (pg. 34). That image sounds almost messianic. To what extent was Zionism a messianic movement? Is messianism of that sort a positive or negative attribute? Why?

Chapter 3: A Conversation, Not an Ideology—Zionism Divisions at the Turn of the Century

- Bialik and other Zionist poets and authors also saw Zionism as a rebellion against the Jewish tradition of Eastern Europe, a way of life that had made them weak, virtual victims on call. It was, they believed, a “cancer that has destroyed the Jew’s humanity” (pg. 50). Do you think their critique of Jewish tradition was fair? If they could see today’s world, in what way(s), if any, might they have shifted their worldview?
- In his desperation to find a home for the Jewish people, Herzl seriously entertained the British proposal that the Jews establish their state in “Uganda.” Many others in the Zionist movement objected vociferously, and the movement almost split. Who do you think was right – Herzl or his opponents? Could a Jewish State in Uganda have succeeded? Why or why not?
- Many of the Zionist thinkers discussed in this book share a common history. They were largely raised in Orthodox families and then separated from Jewish tradition. Is there something about this personal history that primes someone for Zionism? What perspectives/experiences can these individuals bring to the table that others cannot?
- Ahad Ha’am said, “It would be better if the Jewish people were to disappear from the face of history than to find itself trapped in the meaningless power mongering of a small state populated by individuals of Jewish ancestry but which would otherwise not be a Jewish state” (pg. 56). Ahad Ha’am seems to be saying that a Jewish state without Jewish character is a worse outcome than the disappearance of Judaism. Do you think that Ahad Ha’am would have maintained this assertion after the Holocaust? What do you think Ahad Ha’am would say about the concept of a “new Jew”?
- In this chapter, Kishinev is described as a condition rather than as an event (pg. 51). What is the difference between a *condition* and an *event*? How does Kishinev’s status as a *condition* influence its permanence in Jewish collective memory? What other *events* in Jewish history are really *conditions*?

Chapter 4: From Abstract Dream to First Glimmers of Reality—A Jewish Revival in Palestine

- This chapter focuses, among other issues, on the rebirth of the Hebrew language thanks to the work of Eliezer Ben-Yehuda. Why was the (re)creation of a language so critical to the Zionist enterprise? What does a language do for a people that made it such a central element of the project? What do you think is the impact of the fact that most American Jews do not speak Hebrew – the language of the Jewish people’s liberation movement? How has that affected the relationship between American Jews and Israel?
- “Much of the assistance that the Yishuv needed came in the form of support from the Diaspora Jews” (pg. 77). How do you imagine it felt for those wishing to establish a new Jewish persona to be dependent on continued assistance from Diaspora Jews? Do you think that dynamic still affects the relationship between Israeli Jews and Jews of the Diaspora?
- “By virtue of having been purposely established on the dangerous borders of Israel, the kibbutzim would also become critical to Israel’s ongoing defense. That, in turn, created a culture of patriotic devotion in these communities” (pg. 85). What is the equivalent of this in Israel today? How does the kibbutz mindset of those years compare to the settlement movement of today?

Chapter 5: The Balfour Declaration—The Empire Endorses the State

-  In 1917, the British Empire gave a significant boost to the Zionist movement by issuing the Balfour Declaration, thus officially endorsing the idea of a national home for the Jewish people in Palestine. By 1938, however, the British limited Jewish immigration to almost nothing, thus snuffing out that promise. What does their shift in tone suggest about the standing of the idea of a Jewish State in the international community? In 2016, the Palestinian Authority announced that they [were suing the United Kingdom](#) for having issued the Declaration. What does that suggest about the future of the region?
- By the late 1930's, "the Yishuv had advanced water technology far beyond what it had been when the Jews arrived" (pg. 101). Why do you think the Yishuv, and then Israel, have long been at the forefront of technological innovation? Was it merely a matter of necessity, or did something else drive this? Aside from its obvious advantages, does this history of innovative technology have any downsides for Israel?
- To what extent do you think the situations of Palestinian Arabs and Native Americans are analogous? In what way(s) might they be different? What does Jabotinsky's quote on page 105 add to this discussion?
- In "The Iron Wall," Jabotinsky wrote, "The only way to reach an agreement in the future is to abandon all idea of seeking an agreement at present" (pg. 106). Do you think this statement was true then? To what extent does this statement hold true today? How has this attitude shaped Israel's development and the peace process?
- Compare the Betar anthem (pg. 109) with Hatikvah (pg. 27). Which do you believe better reflects the character of what the Jewish state should be? Which reflects what it actually became? What should a national anthem express? Were the national anthem written to reflect today's Israel, how might it be different?

Chapter 6: Nowhere to Go, Even if They Could Leave—The Second World War and the Holocaust

- Was Haim Arlosoroff right to set up the Transfer Agreement with Germany? What values were in tension in the decision he made? Can you name other instances in which the Yishuv or Israel has had to take action in the midst of deeply conflicting moral commitments?
- Why do you think Israeli folk-dance became such a widespread phenomenon? What did it bespeak about the Jewish people and its transformation in the twentieth century that made it so popular? What did Israeli folk dance say about the new Jew?
- "A small state is better than no state," said Chaim Weizmann. "[The Jews] would be fools not to accept it, even if it were the size of a tablecloth" (pg. 123). Why do you think Weizmann's view ultimately prevailed in the Yishuv? What motivated the Jewish community to accept Peel, and then the Partition Plan of 1947? Why do you think the Arab community rejected both?

- How did the British response (White Paper) to Arab violence contribute to the perpetuation of violence? In what ways might this early British reaction have played a formative role in the development of Palestinian resistance?

Chapter 7: The Yishuv Resists the British, the Arabs Battle Partition

- Why did women like Sarah Aaronsohn and Chana Senesh become so iconic in Zionist lore? What did they represent that spoke powerfully to the Jewish community, then and even now? Can you think of contemporary figures who represent these same values?
- “Weizmann said terrorism was a ‘cancer in the body’ and argued that creating a Jewish state by ‘un-Jewish methods’ would defeat the entire purpose” (pg. 144). What does “un-Jewish” mean? Might “un-Jewish” mean different things to the old Jew and the new Jew? How? To your mind, what makes something “un-Jewish”? Is there a difference between “un-Jewish” and “immoral” as the term is generally used, or do they mean the same thing?
- “Bullies may well bother you at school or in the street someday ... But from now on, from the moment we have our own state, you will never be bullied just because you are a Jew. Not that. Never again. From tonight that’s finished here. Forever” (pg. 149). In November 1949, Amos Oz’s father promised him that having a state would end anti-Semitism, at least in Palestine, and would change the existential condition of the Jew. To what extent has that promise been realized? Why?
- “To this day, [Arabs] use Deir Yassin as part of their claim that Israel was ‘born in sin’” (pg. 161). How would Israel being “born in sin” affect the state’s legitimacy? Think about other countries that displaced (or even eradicated) native populations, such as the United States (Native Americans), Canada (First Nations), and Australia (Anangu Pitjantjatjara). Why, to your mind, has the plight of the Palestinians become a focus of much of the West, even among Jews, while those same critics rarely mention the treatment of other peoples in those countries?

Chapter 8: Independence—The State Is Born

- Ben-Gurion wrote, “Our planes need to bomb and destroy Amman [and] across the Jordan, and then Syria will fall. We will bomb Port Said, Alexandria and Cairo. Thus we will end the war and settle our ancestors’ score with Egypt, Assyria, and Aram” (pg. 171). What does this attitude to Jewish history suggest about how Ben-Gurion (and other Zionist leaders) saw the emerging Jewish state? What do you think has been the impact of that way of seeing Israel, ever since the establishment of the state in 1948?
- A genius in many ways, Ben-Gurion was also clearly callous and vindictive. Were these necessary characteristics for a man in his position? Could another leader have been as successful without these characteristics? In retrospect, what do you believe Ben-Gurion could have or should have done differently?
- In the Altalena incident, both David Ben-Gurion and Menachem Begin believed that they were telling the truth and acting for the best interests of the newly founded state. What value(s) was/were

of most importance for each of them? What was the net impact of the Altalena? Could a similar situation arise today? If it did, how might it play out? Why?

- Has Israel's tendency to self-critique (as represented in Ben-Gurion's response to Alterman's poem, "For This") helped or harmed Israel's international reputation? How has it done each?
- "Ben-Gurion 'understood the demographic issue and the need to establish a Jewish state without a large Arab minority.' Nothing else would have been viable" (pg. 187). To what extent is this still true today? Has anything changed?
- Had Arab host countries given citizenship to the Palestinian refugees, would the conflict look different today? Would it have mattered?

Chapter 9: From Dreams of a State to the Reality of Statehood

- How do you imagine the application of the Free Compulsory Education Law to Arab children affected the way Arabs see Israel? Israeli Arabs? Palestinian Arabs? The Arab world in general?
- Israel's Declaration of Independence promised a Constitution no later than 1 October 1948, yet Israel has never ratified a Constitution, and many people believe that it is now too late. Why is that? What do you think it says about Israeli society? What might it take for Israel to be able to ratify a Constitution?
-  The suspicion "never proven but passionately believed by many in the Yemenite community—that the government took babies born to Yemenite mothers shortly after their arrival in Israel between 1949 and 1952, when they were living in ma'abarot, and gave them to Ashkenazi families" continues (pg. 209). Israel's National Archive will release additional documents in early 2017. What will the impact be on Israel if the evidence shows the rumors to be true? What do you make of accusations that the [government also took Ashkenazi children](#)? If *that* is true, was the motivation racism or something else? What might it have been?
- This book makes the story of the Mizrachim much more central than do some other histories. Why do think the author feels the Mizrachi chapter of Israel's history is so important? What do you think this part of Israel's history portends for its future?
- Though the American Council for Judaism was the most anti-Zionist of American Jewish groups, misgivings about the mere idea of a Jewish state were widespread among American Jews. Why do you think that was the case? Is today's American Jewish ambivalence about Israel animated by the same concerns or issues? What are they?

Chapter 10: Israel enters the International Arena—The Sinai Campaign of 1956

- "[Moshe Dayan] drew an additional conclusion from the vociferousness of the world's reactions to Qibya, 'what was allowed to Arabs—and to other peoples—would not be forgiven the Jews or Israel' (pg. 225). Later, Golda Meir wrote, "The Arab states unilaterally enjoy the 'rights of war' [while]

Israel has the unilateral responsibility of keeping the peace” (pg. 235). Dayan and Meir seem to be suggesting that there is double standard against Israel. Do you think that is true? If yes, from where do you think it stems? Is there anything Israel could or should do to combat it?

- In *Altneuland*, Herzl describes his intention to help redeem Africans (pg. 236). What do you think Herzl would say if he could see Israel’s current refugee crisis? How would Ben-Gurion respond to any critique Herzl might express? Were it up to you, what would be Israel’s policy on refugees from Africa seeking to make new homes in the Jewish State?
- S. Yizhar’s *Khirbet Khizeh* ridiculed much of Zionist ideology and accused Israel of cruelty during the War of Independence. Yet Israelis elected him to the Knesset on more than one occasion and the Minister of Education included the book in Israel’s high school curriculum. How do you explain that? Is that phenomenon reflective of a positive or negative attribute of Israeli society?

Chapter 11: Israel Confronts the Holocaust

- Israel’s capture of Adolf Eichmann evoked condemnation from all over the world. Why do you think American Jews were so angry? Other countries? Do you think Israel was justified in kidnapping a Nazi from a country far away from both Israel and Germany whose crimes were committed before Israel was even established?
- In what ways do Israel’s capture and execution of Eichmann and the United States’ killing of Osama bin Laden seem analogous to you? In what ways were they different? Does one seem more legitimate to you? Why? One was convicted after a trial, while one was not. Does that matter?
- Was Israel right to accept reparations from Germany? What about Ben-Gurion’s argument do you agree with? What elements of Begin’s argument strike you as correct? What were the long-term implications of Israel having accepting the money? For Israel? For Germany? For survivors? For history?
- Both Arlosoroff and Kasztner were murdered because they negotiated with Germany. How were their actions different from those of the Israeli government when it accepted German reparations? What are the key differences? The primary similarities?
- This chapter makes a distinction between Jews who “perished” and Jews that have “fallen” (pg. 255). What is significant about this distinction? What does it suggest about Israeli character? Is the distinction problematic?

Chapter 12: Six Days of War Change a Country Forever

- In 1967, the Soviets told Egypt and Syria that Israel was planning a war. What was the Soviet’s motive here? What was the historical context?
- Why did so many countries insist that Israel not “shoot first” in June 1967, even though it was clear that war was almost inevitable? In what ways has the international arena changed? In what ways has it not?

- At several points in this chapter, critical personalities state that 1967 was not the same as 1956. What did this mean? Why were there new rules? What had changed? How did these shifts in attitude affect Israel? The international community?
- Prime Minister Levi Eshkol promoted restraint and then gave a radio broadcast that led Israelis to see him as weak and powerless. To what extent is restraint associated with weakness in Israel? Is the “Stammering Speech” to blame for this association? How does this association continue to influence military defense strategy in Israel?
- In what ways is Naomi Shemer’s “Jerusalem of Gold” an anthem of Jerusalem? What makes any song an anthem? Why do you think the song has become so popular?

Chapter 13: The Burden of Occupation

- “Even unavoidable occupation is corrupting occupation” (pg. 284). What does this statement mean? Do you agree? How has the occupation colored Israel’s history since 1967?
 - Professor Yeshayahu Leibowitz argued that Israel should return the territories to the Arabs immediately. He wrote, “It is not our business, nor is it our obligation or our right, to be concerned with what the Arabs will do with the territories once we get out of there” (pg. 288). Was this view point naïve? Would leaving the territories have left Israel vulnerable to Arab extremism or was it the only means to avoid such extremism in the first place?
 - “Allon’s plan came too early, but had it been adopted, the history of the Middle East might have unfolded very differently” (pg. 293). Do you agree? What might have happened differently? Given the Middle East today, do you think that ceding the territories would have been a wise or a foolish move?
 - See the lyrics to Naomi Shemer’s [“Jerusalem of Gold”](#) and Meir Ariel’s [“Jerusalem of Iron.”](#) What emerges from a comparison of the two songs? In this chapter, Shemer and Ariel are described as reflecting entirely different sentiments through their music (pg. 295). What question(s) were they each asking? What were their answers?
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-  Compare Mahmoud Darwash’s poem, “Identity Card” (you can find [the entire text online](#) in multiple places) with Betar’s anthem (pg. 109). What is similar about them? Wherein lie the differences? Is there anything to gain from seeking to understand the Palestinian resistance movement through the lens of Israel’s past?

Chapter 14: The Yom Kippur War—The “Conception” Crashes

- “[Arafat’s] campaign succeeded. Palestinian nationalism was an international concern, and eventually, it would put Israel on the diplomatic defensive” (pg. 306). What do you imagine the Palestinians learned from the fact that terror worked? How might that affect the ongoing conflict in our own time?
- Largely because she was a head of state long before most other countries elected a woman to lead them, Golda Meir has iconic status in Israeli history, particularly among Diaspora Jews. Leaving

aside her gender, however, do you think she was a successful Prime Minister? What were her primary accomplishments? Her main failures?

- How might the mistakes made before and during the Yom Kippur War continue to color Israel's attitude to the conflict today?
- “This [was] the first war in which fathers and sons have been in action together. We never thought that would happen. We—the fathers—fought in order that our sons would not have to go to war” (pg. 317). What do you think it does to a society to accept the reality that every generation will go to war? What impact might this have on the soldiers who must go out and fight? What do you imagine are the consequences of Israelis' awareness that the Jewish state has yet to fight its last war?
- This book argues that, in many ways, the Yom Kippur War took the wind out of Israel's sails in a manner from which Israel has never fully recovered. Does that seem plausible to you? Why? To what extent might the Yom Kippur War have undermined Israeli faith in the new Jew? How might this, in turn, have influenced the movement away from obdurate secularism?
- “It will be a pleasure,’ several American Jewish leaders occasionally remarked after the Yom Kippur War, ‘to deal with a lesser Israel” (pg. 322). Why do you think American Jewish leaders felt this way? What bothered them about Israel's attitude after the Six Day War? How do you think this attitude to Israel has played out in subsequent decades?

Chapter 15: Revolution within the Revolution—The Rise and Revenge of Israel's Political Right

- Why does this book call the rise of the Israeli right a “revolution within the revolution”? Do you agree with that description? In what ways are each of those revolutions still unfolding? In what ways might they be over?
- “The Egyptian president got the Sinai back by being the first Arab head of state to make peace with Israel and by selling out the Palestinians” (pg. 332). Saudi Arabia has limitless funds, yet many Palestinians live in poverty. Egypt signed a peace treaty with Israel without obtaining any gains for the Palestinians. Then, Jordan did the same. Why is it that Arab states have continued to sell out the Palestinians? How do you imagine that might color the conduct of the conflict today?
- Begin supported withdrawing from land (the Sinai) for the sake of peace, while, at the same time, advocated for settlements in the West Bank. Are these two positions fundamentally inconsistent? How would Begin have claimed that those policies could co-exist? What do you imagine Begin might do today were he Prime Minister?
- “We will be nobody's cowering Jew” (pg. 342). Whose influence can be heard in Begin's words? In what ways did Begin's personal history in Europe influence his decision making as Prime Minister? Was his personal history a weakness or a strength?
- Many people refer to the First Lebanon War as “Israel's Vietnam.” Why do people often make that comparison? In what ways is the analogy apt? How did the Lebanon War differ from the Vietnam War? Do you think the Lebanon War was ultimately a mistake? What did Israel gain? What did it lose?

Chapter 16: Taking a Page from the Zionists—The Rise of Palestinian Nationalism

- Why does this book refer to the rise of Palestinian nationalism as “Taking a Page from the Zionists”? In what ways is Palestinian nationalism similar to Zionism? What do you think are the major differences between the two movements?
- Did the Oslo Accords ultimately move the peace process forward or set it back? Why is that? What can we learn about each of the sides based on their reactions to Oslo’s failure?
- The instances in which Israel practices restraint evoke imagery of Kishinev. Is this problematic or dangerous? How might the association between restraint and Jewish victimhood influence both national and international opinion? Is the international community likely to be more or less sympathetic when these images are evoked? Why?
- What were the consequences of Rabin’s death? What might Israel look like today if Rabin had not been assassinated? How might the region have been different? Do you think peace was ever a real possibility? Why?
- Hamas and Hezbollah base their rejection of Israel’s right to exist largely on religious principle. Similarly, a growing body of religious Jews in Israel insists that God gave the land of Israel to the Jews, so there is no possibility of compromise. How does the shift of the conflict from political to religious shape the likelihood of its resolution? What might Israeli leaders do in light of that?

Chapter 17: The Peace Process Stalls

- Ariel Sharon’s visit to the Temple Mount was not the first or last time that Palestinian fury erupted over rumors that the Jews were doing damage to the Temple Mount or changing the status quo there. Similar rumors led to the massacre of the Jewish community of Hebron in 1929 (see page 106) and to the “stabbing Intifada” in 2015-16. Why this pattern? Was there actually something controversial about what Sharon did or was it simply an excuse for violence? What do you think Sharon hoped would happen when he made the visit?
- The “separation barrier” that Israel erected during the Second Intifada stunted terror attacks, but contributed to the condemnation of Israel in the international community and created significant hardships for many innocent Palestinians. Was Israel right to construct the wall? What does the image of the wall suggest to you about the future of the region?
- “Embracing the civilians they were evicting, some soldiers wept; others sat down to join the evacuees in prayer” (pg. 387). While evicting Israelis from Gaza, IDF soldiers demonstrated a great capacity for deep humanity. Do you think that Israel could have demonstrated a similar level of empathy toward the Palestinians? Why or why not? Would that have changed the course of the conflict? Why or why not?
- “It was clear that if the UN had to vote again on the creation of a Jewish state, unlike the outcome in November 1947, this time the motion would have virtually no chance of passing” (pg. 395). What has changed since 1947? What factors contribute to the UN’s anti-Israel stance today? Do you think most people are aware of how hostile to Israel the UN has become? Why is that?

Chapter 18: A Jewish Renaissance in the Jewish State

- “If Israel were not democratic, [Ruth Gavison] believed, it would have no *justification* for being. If it were not palpably Jewish, it would have no *reason* to be” (pg. 408). What is Gavison’s basic point? Do you agree? Do you think that Israel can maintain both its Jewishness and its democratic nature? Why?
- While describing the difference between Mizrachim and Ashkenazim, the distinction is made between *loyalty* and *obedience* in the context of religious observance. Is this distinction relevant in other spheres of Israeli society? In what areas is Israel more Mizrachi? In what realms is Israel more Ashkenazi?
- Today, Mizrachi Jews account for slightly more than half of Israel’s Jewish population. Given the cultural differences between Mizrachi and Ashkenazi Jews, what do you imagine will be the impact of Israel’s increasingly Mizrachi character on relations between Israel and American Jews?
- What would early Zionist leaders have thought of the “hilltop youth?” In what ways do you believe they are an embodiment of Zionist values? In what ways have they departed from the values of traditional Zionism?
- “Israel could never have become the Jewish spiritual center it was becoming were it not for the fact that it was also a nation state” (pg. 415). Do you agree with this statement? Why or why not?
- Is today’s Israeli the embodiment of what early Zionists sought to create in the “new Jew”? Why? Has the drive to create a “new Jew” ultimately been successful? Why?

Conclusion: A Century After Balfour—“A National Home for the Jewish People”

-  A contemporary Jewish writer [wrote not long ago](#), “Plant a Jewish people in a country that comes to a standstill on Yom Kippur; speaks the language of the Bible; moves to the rhythms of the Hebrew (lunar) calendar; builds cities with the stones of its ancestors; produces Hebrew poetry and literature, Jewish scholarship and learning unmatched anywhere in the world—and you have continuity.” Do you think that quote captures what has been successful about Israel? Does it reflect your expectations of the Jewish state? If you have expectations that it does not reflect, what are they?
- “The renewal of that ancient language has become a metaphor for the renewal of the richness of Jewish life and the Jewish people that have unfolded in the Jewish state in a way that cannot be replicated anywhere else in the world” (pg. 421). In what ways is the revival of the Hebrew language a necessary condition for the revival of Jewish life? Is language key to the richness of a people’s life? How would Israel have been different had its founders chosen English, Russian or German as its language?
- “Living in Israel meant knowing that there was no keyhole through which to glimpse the future” (pg. 425). Still, no one can help but try to imagine what lies in Israel’s future and in that of the Jewish people. How do you imagine Israel in 50 years? 100? What gives you the most hope and confidence? What worries you most?

General Questions to consider about *Israel: A Concise History of a Nation Reborn*?

- Looking back on the last 75 years, do you think that the state of Israel has been a success or a failure? What did it set out to do? What part(s) of that did it accomplish? What part of its purpose has it not accomplished?
- How do you think Jewish sovereignty has shaped Jewish identity in Israel? In the Diaspora? Has Israel, on the whole, had a positive or destructive impact on Jewish identity?
- How has the occupation changed Israel's national character? Is there anything that Israel should have done differently? If you could shape Israel's political and diplomatic direction, where would you have Israel head?
- To what extent does collective Jewish memory (Kishinev and the Holocaust, for example) continue to influence Israeli politics and culture? Has this influence made Israel more successful or less successful? More courageous or less courageous?
- Having read *Israel: A Concise History of a Nation Reborn*, do you imagine that your future conversations about Israel will be different than they were before you read the book? In what way(s)? Why?