

Important Israel Advocacy Conversation Follow-up

When we are in conversations about Israel, it is impossible for anyone to know *every* answer to *every* question. It can be scary to jump into a conversation without having all of the information.

What if they ask you a question, or make an accusation, and you don't know what to say?

Fortunately, having a productive and persuasive conversation about Israel is possible so long as you remember just a few things.

First, make sure that your dialogue is grounded in inquiry, empathy, and humility.

1. **Inquiry:** We must be able to **ask questions and listen**. We cannot understand the values and concerns of another person unless we ask questions to uncover them. Ask questions like “What’s at the heart of the matter for you?” “What do you mean by ___?” “How would you handle ___ situation?” or even “What assumptions are you making about ___?” Ask these questions not to rebut, but to understand.
2. **Empathy:** Inquiry leads to empathy. If you are asking the right questions and truly listening, you’ll start to relate to the other person and better understand their relationship to Israel. At this point, you need to **express compassion** for your dialogue partner. **Acknowledge their concerns and express genuine empathy for all people suffering in the conflict**, including Palestinians. Empathy is the most disarming tool we have in dialogue.
3. **Humility:** At this point, you may feel a bit humbled. Perhaps it may occur to you that in some ways your assumptions have been off-base. You should have opened your heart to another story and acknowledged it in a refreshing way. If you are not authentically humble in the conversation, it will be hard for you to express empathy or really seek to understand the other person. Most importantly, **humility begets humility; if you exhibit an openness to learn and be wrong, your dialogue partner will do the same**.

Second, remember that although there are an infinite number of accusations one may make against Israel, nearly all of them can be primarily categorized under the following headings:

- **Occupation:** Many people will claim either that Israel is entirely responsible for the occupation of Palestinians or that the occupation is the primary obstacle to peace. It is important to remember that Israel has a moral and legal right to exist; Israel has tried to end the occupation and offer land for peace on multiple occasions; and that the occupation is the product of a conflict that many countries and peoples are perpetuating. **It is certainly an obstacle to peace, but it is not the sole obstacle, nor can Israel be exclusively blamed for it.**
- **Disproportionate/Excessive Force:** Many people will assert that Israel uses excessive force against Palestinians. They may point to the disproportionate casualty rate between Palestinians and Israelis in recent conflicts. It is important to remember that one must have genuine empathy for all civilians injured or killed in conflict. **Israel has an obligation to protect its citizens from terrorism and emphasizes the preservation of civilian life on both sides.** Israel frequently warns Palestinians civilians prior to airstrikes, calls off strikes when civilians are nearby, and puts its own soldiers in harm’s way to preserve the lives of Palestinians.
- **Racism:** Many people argue that Israel is a uniquely racist and discriminatory country. They may even contend that Zionism is inherently racist. It’s important to remember that **Zionism, and the State of Israel, are rooted in liberal values no different than most other Western nations.** Israel’s Declaration of Independence explicitly welcomed Arabs into the newly formed nation of Israel and offered equal rights and opportunities for all citizens. **Zionism itself is rooted in the fundamental concepts of freedom, justice, and equality for all peoples.**