



ISRAEL AND THE ROCHESTER RELATIONSHIP

Jews in the United States have a strong historic, spiritual and emotional bond to Israel, the birthplace of Judaism. The [Pew Research Center Report on Jewish Americans in 2020](#) found a large majority of U.S. Jews (82%) say caring about Israel is either “essential” or “important” to what being Jewish means to them. Similarly, in Rochester, the “[Every Voice Counts](#)” survey found that 81% of the Rochester Jews feel at least somewhat emotionally attached to Israel, with 49% feeling very attached.

Israel is the only democratic state in the Middle East and is comprised of Jews and non-Jews with a population of over 9.3 million people (74% Jews (Ashkenazi, Sephardic, Mizrahi, Ethiopian); 21% Arab including Muslims (and Circassians), Arab Christians (including Armenians) and Druze; about 467,000 people are defined as others, including non-Arab Christians, members of other religions and those registered as having no religious classification in the population registry).

The vibrant society that makes up Israel is so different from the narrow view that much of the world understands. These videos introduce you to the diversity of Israel and provide a brief overview of the history of Israel (with links to a more in-depth series).

WATCH: [Who are Israelis, Really?](#) (7:38) Unpacked.

WATCH: [History of Israel Explained](#) (4:24) Unpacked.

ROCHESTER’S CONNECTION WITH MODI’IN

Rochester has a special relationship with Modi’in (pronounced Mo-dee-eene), our partner city in Israel. Modi’in is a planned city halfway between Israel’s largest cities, Jerusalem and Tel Aviv. In ancient times, Modi’in was the home of the Maccabees, the Jewish group that revolted against their oppressors in what became the story of Hanukkah.

WATCH: [Holy Land Uncovered: Routes Uncovered: Hanukkah and Modi’in](#) (8:57)

WATCH: [Bike the Hanukkah Story](#) (1:28)

VIEW: [This Map Shows Where the Hanukkah Story Happened](#) My Jewish Learning

The bond between Rochester and Modi’in is strong and continues to grow, as we partner through cross cultural and collaborative programs, including our Education Bridge (Teacher exchange), Journey for Identity (Teen program), Brighton High School Student Exchange and Ramim (mid-career professional exchange).

WATCH: [RAMIM](#) (1:54)

Through this partnership, we also have welcomed, four [ShinShinim](#) (pronounced shin-shin-eem), who are post-high school Israelis serving as ambassadors as they live and work in Rochester for one year, sharing their Israeli culture with students (including Brighton, Pittsford and the University of Rochester), families, synagogues and around the community.

WATCH: [ShinShinim Shine a Light](#)

Our partnerships are about building relationships, connection and ultimately, about people.

CRITICISM OF ISRAEL

In recent years, Israel and its people have been demonized politically, in the media and on college campuses, especially in the US and Europe, as Israel has been accused of “colonizing”, “ethnic cleansing” and apartheid – false narratives. On Day 5 we shared content on the meaning of Zionism and how it has been co-opted to mean something that it’s not.

As we discussed previously, criticizing the Israeli government’s policies isn’t necessarily antisemitic – just as we would criticize any government’s policies, including our own; but criticism of Israel can be antisemitic when double standards, delegitimization and demonization are used in an attempt to cloak antisemitism as something else.

While there is plenty of room for criticism of Israeli government policy, there should be no room for the exclusionary, reductionist and dehumanizing language in political discourse on the topic.

WATCH: [Rabbi Sacks on the Connection between Antisemitism, Anti-Zionism, Judaism and Israel](#) (5:58)

READ: [To My Fellow Progressives: Anti-Zionism is Antisemitism](#). Oren Jacobson. The Detroit Jewish News. November 5, 2021

CASE STUDY: THE BOYCOTT, DIVEST, SANCTIONS MOVEMENT

Since 2000 organized campaigns around the world have promoted the “boycott, divestment and sanctions” of Israel. Some supporters may believe that these efforts will encourage Israel to change its policies towards Palestinians in the Gaza Strip and West Bank. However, the predominant drive of the BDS campaign and its leadership is not to criticize and change these policies, but to demonize and delegitimize Israel. The complex Israeli-Palestinian conflict has presented as the fault of only Israel. The BDS campaign does not support peace efforts and rejects a two-state solution and actually penalizes many Palestinians living and working in Israel and the West Bank.

WATCH or READ: [Rabbi Sacks on the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions \(BDS\) campaign](#) (6:07)

READ: [What is BDS?](#) My Jewish Learning.

READ: [Ben and Jerry’s Boycott Hurts Palestinians](#). The Times of Israel. July 21, 2021.

READ: [Miss Universe Says Pageant in Israel Shouldn’t be Politicized Amid Boycott Pressure](#). Forbes. November 17, 2021

DEEPER DIVES

READ: [Modi’in and the Hanukkah: The Jewish Right to Light](#) The Jerusalem Post. December 22, 2020

WATCH: [Modi’in Today](#) (1:52.00)

WATCH: [The Mainstreaming of Antisemitism: How Should We Respond?](#) (55:28) American Jewish Committee Virtual Global Forum with Bret Stephens, Bari Weiss and Simone Rodan-Benzaquen.

LISTEN: [Combatting Rising Jew Hatred](#) (55:49) In a recent Jewish Boston podcast, Dr. Rachel Fish, addresses the surge in anti-Israel actions and hate crimes against Jews.

ACT

"Darkness cannot drive out darkness, only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate, only love can do that." -- Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

Stand with the Jewish community against hate and antisemitism.

PARTICIPATE: *The Blue Light Project.* Stand against hate and "Shine a Light on Antisemitism" by replacing a light outside of your home or business with a blue light or placing a lamp with a blue light in your window from December through April 26, 2023 (Yom Ha'atzmaut, Israeli Independence Day). This project is a collaboration between the Jewish Federation and ROC Against Antisemitism.

The lightbulbs will be available for pick-up at the Louis S. Wolk Jewish Community Center.

The blue light bulbs have been made available through the generosity of Kovalsky-Carr Electric Supply and have been sourced from the electrical supply business of Holocaust Survivor, Herb Gilden. Learn about his story here: [The Starfish](#).

DISPLAY AND SHARE: Place a menorah in your window during the 8 nights of Chanukah.