



THINK, THEN TALK

15 Ideas for Understanding Israel

**UNPKD
TEENS**





More Than a Hot Take: Think, Then Talk:
15 Ideas for Understanding Israel

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**THINK, THEN TALK: 15 IDEAS FOR
UNDERSTANDING ISRAEL**

More Than a Hot Take

This is Unpacked Teens. A place to explore Israel, Judaism and the Jewish experience, not once, but for as long as you need it.

A lot is happening. In school, on your feed, at your dinner table. And most of it isn't being explained properly. Everyone has opinions. Nobody seems to have the full story. We give you both, so you can figure out what you actually think.

WHAT THIS PAMPHLET IS

At Unpacked, we believe in real conversations, the kind built on evidence, nuanced thinking and understanding rather than recycled talking points. We believe in education over advocacy.

Why education instead of advocacy? Because it's more credible and transparent. Advocacy starts with a defensive posture, and often means presenting only the good parts and hoping no one asks hard questions. Education means engaging with the full story, including the complicated parts, and trusting people to handle it. That honesty is also what makes it more effective. People can tell when they're being sold something, and they stop listening. They stay in the conversation when they sense you're actually willing to think alongside them.

Here's the thing: Israel comes up everywhere right now. In your feed, in your school, at your Shabbat table. And most of

the time it's not being explained well. Everyone has an opinion. Very few people have the full picture. That gap is a problem, because these conversations have real stakes, and how you show up in them matters.

That's why we made this.

WE'RE GIVING YOU THREE THINGS



The facts you
actually need
to understand
the history



A mindset
for when
things get
complicated



Real skills
for the
conversations
that follow

Not talking points. Not a side to pick. The actual story, and the tools to do something with it.

Because here's what we've learned: People don't disengage from hard conversations because they don't care. They disengage because nobody ever gave them what they needed to stay in. This pamphlet is meant to change that.

Finishing this pamphlet is a beginning, not an ending. Israel's story is still unfolding, and the more you learn, the more you'll realize how much there is still to know. That's not discouraging. That's just what it looks like to take something seriously. Use this as a foundation. Keep learning. Keep going.



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IDEA 01

Two peoples can be indigenous to the same land

Long before modern Zionism, Jews maintained a continuous presence in and connection to Israel: religious, cultural, and physical. The land features in daily prayer, in the calendar, in the entire texture of Jewish life for thousands of years. Zionism is the political expression of something much older. At the same time, Palestinians have their own deep roots in this land, tied to generations of family history, villages and culture. Indigeneity is not a zero-sum contest.

A FEW FACTS WORTH KNOWING

The Merneptah Stele, an Egyptian monument from around 1208 BCE, is inscribed with the earliest known non-biblical reference to "Israel" as a people in Canaan, giving the Jewish connection to this land one of the longest archaeological paper trails of any modern people.

There was a continuous Jewish presence in the land even after the Roman exile in 70CE. Safed became a major center of Jewish scholarship and mysticism in the 16th century;

Hasidic communities settled in the 18th century. These weren't returnees from nowhere. They were part of a continuous thread.

By the mid-19th century, Jews were already a plurality in Jerusalem, well before the organized Zionist immigration waves began in the 1880s.

BIG IDEA The story of the Jewish people and this land doesn't begin in 1897 or 1948. It spans two millennia of longing, presence, and return. Recognizing that doesn't require erasing anyone else's connection.

WORTH ASKING When did the Jewish connection to this land begin? Most people, including many Jews, don't know about 2,000+ years of continuous presence. And can two peoples both be indigenous to the same land? What happens to the conversation when the answer is yes?

FURTHER LEARNING

- Are Jews indigenous to Israel? (VIDEO)
- Before Zionism had a name (PODCAST)

IDEA 02

Zionism is not one thing, it is a spectrum of ideas and visions

From the beginning, Zionists disagreed about what a Jewish state should look like. There's religious Zionism, cultural Zionism, socialist Zionism, revisionist Zionism, and today, people who support Israel's existence while deeply disagreeing with its government.

Political Zionism (Theodor Herzl): Herzl's vision was pragmatic and diplomatic. He cared less about where the Jewish state would be than that it exist. His 1896 pamphlet *Der Judenstaat* laid out the case for a sovereign Jewish state recognized by the world's powers.

Cultural Zionism (Ahad Ha'am): Ha'am was skeptical of rushing to statehood. He wanted Palestine to become a spiritual and cultural center for Jewish civilization. He also issued early warnings about the need to treat the Arab population with fairness.

Religious Zionism (Rabbi Avraham Yitzhak Kook): Religious Zionism framed the return to the land not just as a political project but as a spiritual one, a step in a divinely ordained process of redemption. Rav Kook, the first Ashkenazi Chief Rabbi of Mandatory Palestine, believed that even secular Zionist pioneers were unknowingly participating in this sacred

unfolding. His son, Rabbi Zvi Yehuda Kook, later inspired a generation of religious Zionists, including the settlement movement Gush Emunim after 1967, to see Jewish sovereignty over the biblical Land of Israel as a religious imperative.

Labor/Socialist Zionism (David Ben-Gurion, Golda Meir): The dominant ideology of the pre-state period and Israel's early decades. Labor Zionists believed in building the state from the ground up through communal farming (kibbutzim) and socialist institutions. Ben-Gurion became Israel's first prime minister; Meir became its first female prime minister.

Revisionist Zionism (Ze'ev Jabotinsky): Jabotinsky argued that the Jewish state could only be secured through military force. He advocated for a Jewish state on both sides of the Jordan River and trained a militant underground movement. His ideology was the precursor to the Israeli Right.

BIG IDEA You can love Israel and criticize it. Zionism can mean different things to different people.

WORTH ASKING What kind of Zionist am I? And what did the founders actually disagree about? What does it reveal that Herzl and Ahad Ha'am, or Ben-Gurion and Jabotinsky, had such different visions for the same project?

FURTHER LEARNING

- What is Zionism? (VIDEO)
- Truth vs. Myth with Haviv Rettig Gur (PODCAST)
- Crash course in Zionism (PODCAST)

IDEA 03

Before 1948: rising tensions and a map drawn by outsiders

The conflict didn't start in 1948. In 1916, Britain and France secretly divided the Middle East between themselves without consulting a single Arab or Jewish leader. Britain then promised the land to Jews (Balfour, 1917), to Arabs (Hussein-McMahon, 1915), and effectively to itself. While outsiders pulled the strings on the map, tensions on the ground were turning violent. In 1929, Arab rioters massacred 67 Jews in Hebron, destroying a community that had lived there for centuries. Violence ran in multiple directions. Jewish underground militias also struck at the British: the most notorious example is the 1946 bombing of the King David Hotel in Jerusalem by the Irgun, which killed 91 people.

The Arab Revolt of 1936-39 saw Palestinian Arabs launch a major uprising against both British rule and Jewish immigration. In April 1948, weeks before the state was declared, Jewish paramilitary forces killed over 100 Palestinians at Deir Yassin. The event is contested: some historians describe it as a massacre of civilians; others note the village had an armed defense and the attack took place in a military context. What is not contested is that news of Deir Yassin spread quickly and accelerated Palestinian flight. It remains a defining symbol of the Nakba.

Around the same time, the Haganah issued Plan Dalet, a military plan ahead of the expected Arab invasion. Critics argue it was a blueprint for expelling Palestinians; mainstream historians generally describe it as a defensive strategy to secure contiguous territory. The debate among historians is genuine and ongoing. By the time the British left, two peoples had been promised the same land, and both had blood on the ground.

BIG IDEA Modern Middle East borders are largely colonial inventions, and the violence between the two communities predates the state itself. "Why can't they just make peace?" ignores both the political chaos outsiders created and the wounds both peoples carried into 1948.

WORTH ASKING How much of this conflict is the result of broken promises and great-power maneuvering?

FURTHER LEARNING

- Sykes-Picot & San Remo (VIDEO)
- What is the Balfour Declaration? (VIDEO)
- Did a Secret 1916 Treaty Create Israel? (PODCAST)
- Balfour Declaration (PODCAST)
- Deir Yassin: The Battle for Truth (PODCAST)

IDEA 04

1948 has two true stories

For Israelis, 1948 is independence: the fulfillment of a 2,000-year dream and survival against five invading armies. It is celebrated as Yom Ha'atzmaut, Independence Day. For Palestinians, it is remembered as the Nakba, "catastrophe," the displacement of 700,000 people from their homes. Approximately 400 to 500 Palestinian villages were depopulated, many destroyed. Families lost land, property, and communities that had existed for generations.

"Palestinians" in this context refers to the Arab population living in the land at the time, Muslims and Christians whose families had been there for generations, and who were not part of the Jewish movement to build a state there. The term "Palestinian Arabs" is sometimes used to distinguish this population from Jewish residents of the same land during the same period. Today, "Palestinians" refers to that community and its descendants, including those living in the West Bank, Gaza, Israel, and in diaspora around the world. It is used here as a descriptor of a people and their experience, not as a political position on statehood or borders.

The Palestinian refugee question, who has the right to return and on what terms, sits at the center of every peace negotiation to this day. How did 700,000 people end up

displaced? The honest answer involves a combination of causes: some fled in fear after hearing about events like Deir Yassin, some were expelled by Israeli forces, some left in the chaos of war expecting to return. The proportions remain contested. What is not contested is the scale of the displacement and the permanence of its consequences. Both happened at the same time.

BIG IDEA Holding both stories doesn't mean both sides are equally right or wrong. It means understanding why the conflict has become intractable. A country was born and a people was scattered at the same moment.

WORTH ASKING What are the different narratives of 1948? How do these narratives continue to shape the conflict today

FURTHER LEARNING

- Did Israel Expel Palestinian Arabs? (VIDEO)
- Who Has the Right to Return? (PODCAST)
- 1948 Exodus the Birth of Israel and the Refugee Crisis (PODCAST)
- The Hope; Israel at 75 (PODCAST)

IDEA 05

The Holocaust made Israel urgent but it didn't cause Zionism

Modern Zionism existed for fifty years before World War II. It wasn't a response to the Holocaust, but it was in large part a response to persecution. The pogroms that swept through Russia and Eastern Europe in the late 1800s, the Dreyfus Affair in France, centuries of expulsions and violence, all of it pushed early Zionists to envision a world where Jews could take control of their own destiny instead of depending on the goodwill of others. The Holocaust was not the first catastrophe. It was the catastrophe that made the argument for a Jewish state undeniable. Israel is often misread as a compensation project for the Holocaust. That misses the larger story.

BIG IDEA Zionism was born from the conviction that Jews needed self-determination, decades before the Holocaust proved the point. If a Jewish state had existed in 1933, millions of lives might have been saved. The founding of Israel and the memory of the Holocaust are inseparable, but one did not cause the other.

WORTH ASKING In 1945, where were the survivors supposed to go? What were the pogroms, and why did they convince Herzl and others that emancipation in Europe had failed? And why does the Jewish connection to this land predate the Holocaust by thousands of years?

FURTHER LEARNING

- Crash Course in Zionism pt. 4 & 5 (PODCAST)
 - The Iron Wall & Jabotinsky (VIDEOS)
-

IDEA 06

Israel is not just Ashkenazi, it is a mosaic of cultures in a Middle Eastern country

Over half of Israeli Jews are Mizrahi, descended from Jewish communities in Arab and Muslim countries. Most fled or were expelled after 1948, from Morocco, Iraq, Yemen, Egypt, Iran. Why did they leave? The establishment of Israel triggered waves of violence and legal persecution against Jewish communities across the Arab world. In Iraq, where Jews had lived for 2,600 years and made up a significant part of Baghdad's professional class, pogroms followed Israel's independence. Jews lost citizenship rights, had assets

frozen, and were effectively pushed out with almost nothing. In Morocco, anti-Jewish riots in 1948 killed dozens. Across the region, Jewish communities that had been present for centuries — merchants, doctors, scholars — were dismantled within a generation. What they built in Israel reshaped the country. Mizrahi culture now dominates Israeli life in ways that go unnoticed from the outside: Israeli pop music blends Middle Eastern scales and rhythms with modern production; Israeli food: hummus, shakshuka, couscous, is largely Mizrahi and North African in origin; Mizrahi political mobilization in the 1970s and 80s helped bring the Likud party to power for the first time and permanently shifted Israel's political map. The image of Israel as a Western European project leaves all of this out entirely.

BIG IDEA The Mizrahi story is essential to understanding Israel: the idea of Israel as simply Europe transplanted to the Middle East doesn't map onto it.

WORTH ASKING When we picture "two sides" in the conflict, which Jews are we picturing? The Farhud in Iraq and the expulsions across the Arab world are just as central as the European Jewish story.

FURTHER LEARNING

- [Moroccan Jews](#) (VIDEO)
- [Mizrahi Jews](#) (VIDEO)
- [The Farhud — Iraq's Jews](#) (VIDEO)
- [Farhud — The Massacre You Should Know](#) (PODCAST)

IDEA 07

The Six-Day War created one of today's most central problems

In 1967, Israel won a stunning victory and gained control of the West Bank, Gaza, Sinai, and the Golan Heights. Before the war, Jerusalem was divided: West Jerusalem was Israeli, and East Jerusalem, including the Old City and the Western Wall, was Jordanian. Jews had been barred from their holiest sites for nineteen years.

When Israeli paratroopers reached the Western Wall on June 7, 1967, the moment was electric and remains emotionally foundational for many Jews.

For Palestinians, the capture of East Jerusalem placed Muslim and Christian holy sites under Israeli control and displaced tens of thousands of residents.

The territories captured in 1967, and the West Bank especially, are controversial for several reasons: international law, including UN Resolution 242, calls for Israeli withdrawal; three months after the war, Arab states meeting in Khartoum

answered with the "Three Nos," no peace with Israel, no recognition of Israel, and no negotiations with it; Israel began building civilian settlements in the West Bank, now housing over 700,000 Israelis, which most of the world considers illegal under international law; and the settlement project gradually transformed an inter-state Arab-Israeli conflict into a direct Israeli-Palestinian conflict over the same land, with two populations increasingly intertwined and no clean separation possible. Before 1967: an Arab-Israeli conflict. After 1967: gradually, an Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

The question of these territories, their status, and the Palestinians living in them remains unresolved, and Israeli society has never agreed on what to do about it.

BIG IDEA What to do with the West Bank is an issue that divides Israelis. Is trading land for peace there really possible?

WORTH ASKING This is probably the single most important historical event for understanding settlements, the territories, and the two-state solution. Do I actually know what happened in 1967 and after?

FURTHER LEARNING

- 6 Days That Changed Israel — Parts 1, 2, 3 (PODCAST)
- 5 Facts Everyone Gets Wrong About the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict (VIDEO)

IDEA 08

Peace was tried, and failed. That's not the end

The Oslo Accords (1993) were a genuine attempt at a two-state solution. They produced Palestinian self-governance and mutual recognition, then collapsed into the Second Intifada and a breakdown of trust.

At Camp David in 2000, Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak offered Yasser Arafat what was described as the most far-reaching offer Israel had ever made: a Palestinian state in Gaza, most of the West Bank, and a capital in East Jerusalem. Arafat walked away without making a counter-proposal. Why? Palestinians argue the offer fell short — that Israeli settlements would have fragmented the West Bank, that Palestinian sovereignty over borders and airspace would have been hollow, and that the refugee question wasn't adequately addressed. President Clinton, who brokered the talks, blamed Arafat for the failure. The Second Intifada that followed — in which Palestinian suicide bombers killed civilians on buses and in restaurants — burned through Israeli public opinion on the prospects for peace.

Many Israelis point to Camp David as proof that there is no partner on the other side. That view is contested, but it is not irrational, and understanding it is essential for understanding Israeli politics today.

BIG IDEA You can believe in a two-state solution and still reckon honestly with why the last real attempts at it fell apart. Understanding why helps more than pretending it never happened.

WORTH ASKING What actually happened at Oslo, Camp David, and in 2008? The honest answer complicates both "Israel doesn't want peace" and "peace is impossible."

FURTHER LEARNING

- Oslo Accords Explained (VIDEO)
- Oslo — The Peace That Wasn't (PODCAST)
- Israeli-Palestinian Conflict — 30-minute Guide (PODCAST)

IDEA 09

Criticizing Israel is not automatically antisemitism, but antisemitism is real

Israel is a country with a government and policies. It can and should be criticized. But some criticism slides into something else: denying Israel's right to exist, applying standards applied to no other country, holding Jews collectively responsible for Israeli actions.

A few patterns worth recognizing: denying Israel's right to exist as a Jewish state while accepting every other nation-state applies a standard used nowhere else; holding all Jews collectively responsible for Israeli government actions is antisemitism, not criticism; conspiracy-inflected language portraying Israel or "the Jews" as uniquely malevolent draws on antisemitic tropes whether or not the speaker intends it. The International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) definition of antisemitism, adopted by many governments, includes examples relating to Israel.

BIG IDEA The 3D test (from Natan Sharansky): Is the criticism demonizing, delegitimizing, or applying a double standard? If yes, it may have crossed a line. But legitimate, rigorous criticism of Israeli policy isn't just allowed in an educational setting. It's necessary for critical thinking.

WORTH ASKING Can we disagree about Israeli policy and still agree that Jews have the right to safety and self-determination? That's not a concession. It's the frame that makes real conversation possible.

FURTHER LEARNING

- Is Criticizing Israel Antisemitic? (VIDEO)
- Facts vs. Feelings — Toba Hellerstein pt. 1 (PODCAST)
- Hard Conversations — 4 Case Studies pt. 2 (PODCAST)

IDEA 10

The apartheid question deserves a real answer

Dismissing the question "Is Israel an apartheid state?" is a mistake. Israel's laws inside the Green Line are not apartheid. Arab citizens of Israel, about 21% of the population, have the right to vote, hold office, serve on the Supreme Court, and are represented in the Knesset. There is discrimination and inequality, as exists in most democracies, but the legal architecture is not apartheid.

The West Bank is more complicated. Israeli settlers live under Israeli civil law, while Palestinians live under a mix of Israeli military law and Palestinian Authority jurisdiction, depending on whether they're in Area A, B, or C, the zones created by the Oslo Accords. Palestinians in the West Bank cannot vote in Israeli elections, even though many aspects of their lives are shaped by Israeli military control. This system is largely a product of Israeli security concerns: checkpoints, permit requirements, and military jurisdiction are justified by Israel as necessary to prevent terrorism and protect its citizens, not as an attempt to create a permanent hierarchy.

Human rights organizations including Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, and the Israeli organization B'Tselem have used the word "apartheid" to describe these conditions. Critics of that framing argue it misrepresents a military occupation as a permanent racial hierarchy, and

that the South Africa comparison breaks down in important ways. The comparison holds in some respects: separate legal systems, movement restrictions, unequal access to resources. It breaks down in others. Sitting with that honestly is more useful than either reflexively accepting or rejecting the label.

Many Israelis recognize this system is imperfect, even uncomfortable, but do not see a realistic alternative that doesn't compromise their security. That gap, between an arrangement few defend as ideal and the absence of an agreed-upon replacement, is part of why the West Bank question has stayed unresolved for so long.

BIG IDEA Engaging honestly with this question is more powerful than refusing it.

WORTH ASKING What was apartheid actually, and what is the situation actually? Where does the comparison hold and where does it break down? Sitting with that question honestly is the stronger position.

FURTHER LEARNING

- Apartheid Wall or Security Fence? (VIDEO)
- Democratic and Jewish or a Democracy and a Jewish State? (VIDEO)
- Is Israel an Apartheid State? Parts 1, 2 (PODCAST)

IDEA 11

Hamas is a terrorist organization. And that's not the whole story

Hamas is a terrorist organization that calls for the destruction of Israel. It is also the governing body in Gaza, the product of decades of failed politics, and an organization millions of Palestinians voted for in 2006. Both things are true.

BIG IDEA Understanding Hamas doesn't mean excusing it. Knowing why it exists, including the collapse of Fatah, the failure of Oslo, and the desperation of Gaza, is essential for understanding the current conflict.

WORTH ASKING Do Hamas's tactics serve its stated goals? And separately: what created the conditions for Hamas in the first place? Both questions matter, and neither cancels the other.

FURTHER LEARNING

- Who is Hamas (VIDEO)
- Hamas, Explained (VIDEO)
- Palestinian Voice — Ahmed Fouad Alkhatib (PODCAST)

IDEA 12

There's a Palestinian story, and it's worth knowing

Palestinian national identity, history, and aspiration are real. Palestinian suffering is real. Why hasn't Palestinian statehood happened? The answer involves Jordan's annexation of the West Bank, PLO rejections of real offers, internal Palestinian politics, and genuine failures on all sides.

BIG IDEA Engaging with the Palestinian narrative isn't "taking sides." It's understanding what the conflict is actually about, and it makes you a better, more credible conversation partner.

WORTH ASKING Can I say "I believe in Israel's right to exist and I also believe Palestinians deserve dignity, safety, and self-determination" and mean it? That's not a contradiction. It may be the only position that makes peace possible.

FURTHER LEARNING

- Palestinian Statehood: Why It Never Happened (PODCAST)
- Palestinian statehood: Why Peace Failed (PODCAST)
- Palestinian Voice — Ahmed Fouad Alkhatib (PODCAST)

IDEA 13

Rabin's assassination changed Israel at its core

When Yigal Amir shot Yitzhak Rabin in November 1995, he didn't just kill a prime minister. He killed the momentum of the peace process and proved that the deepest threat to Israeli democracy could come from within. Many Israelis mark Rabin's death as the moment something irreversible changed.

BIG IDEA Rabin's assassination revealed that Israeli internal divisions, religious vs. secular, left vs. right, weren't just political disagreements. They had become dangerous.

WORTH ASKING This is often overlooked in conversations outside Israel. What does it mean that the debate about peace has real, personal stakes inside Israeli society itself?

FURTHER LEARNING

- Rabin — The Soldier Who Fought for Peace (VIDEO)
- Remembering Rabin — 30th Anniversary (PODCAST)

IDEA 14

October 7 is not the beginning of the story

The Hamas attack of October 7, 2023, was the deadliest day for Jews since the Holocaust. It was not "out of nowhere." October 7 didn't start the conflict, but it likely ended one phase of it. The "status quo" of managing rather than solving collapsed. What comes next is genuinely unknown.

BIG IDEA Understanding what led to October 7, and what has happened since, requires most of the history above.

WORTH ASKING Can I hold three things apart: (1) what happened on October 7 and why it was a war crime, (2) the longer history that led here, and (3) what a just resolution looks like going forward? People collapse these into one. Holding them apart makes real conversation possible.

FURTHER LEARNING

- How October 7 Changed Israel (VIDEO)
- Behind October 7 — Gaza's History (PODCAST)
- Israel's Greatest Paradox — Micah Goodman (PODCAST)

IDEA 15

Israel is a living, beautiful, and real country

Israel has almost 10 million people, a free press, broad civil liberties, a startup economy, deep internal fights about religion and democracy, and citizens who protest their own government in enormous numbers. It is not a monolith, a symbol, or a stand-in for every geopolitical argument.

BIG IDEA The most useful corrective to abstraction is specificity. Israel with Druze soldiers, Ethiopian Jews, Arab citizens, haredi exemptions, a Supreme Court, and a messy democracy is a real place, not an idea.

WORTH ASKING What are the advantages of understanding Israel from the inside instead of how it is portrayed in the media?

FURTHER LEARNING

- Understanding Israeli Society (VIDEO)
- Who are the Palestinians living in Israel? (VIDEO)
- Can Israel Be a Democracy and Jewish State? (VIDEO)
- Israel's Greatest Paradox — Micah Goodman (PODCAST)

HOW TO TALK ABOUT THE ISRAELI-PALESTINIAN STORY

5 Skills for Having a Productive Conversation

These conversations are hard to have well. Most people approach them like a debate to win or a team to beat. What follows is a set of tools for staying in conversation when it gets hard.

SKILL 01

Uninvited persuasion is resisted persuasion

The moment someone feels like you're trying to convince them, they stop listening and start defending. This is true even when you're right, and especially when you're armed with all fifteen ideas above. You are not there to deliver a lecture. Lead with curiosity. Ask how they see it before you say how you see it. People are far more open to your perspective when they don't feel cornered.

TRY *"I'm genuinely curious how you got to that view. Walk me through it?"*

SKILL 02

Know what you see, don't see what you know

Figure out what you are talking about first. Most heated arguments about Israel aren't arguments about facts. They're arguments about labels and assumptions. Two people can agree on exactly what happened in 1948 or in Gaza and still disagree completely about what to call it and why it happened. Before things escalate, slow down and separate the three: what we know happened, what we're calling it, and what we're assuming about intent. Often you'll find more agreement on the facts than either of you expected, and that's a real place to start.

TRY *"Can we separate what we know happened from what we're calling it? I want to make sure we're not fighting about words. We are discussing facts."*

SKILL 03

Be a scout, not a soldier

A soldier defends a position. A scout tries to find out what's true. If you walk in only looking for openings to deploy your best points, the other person will feel it, and they'll do the same to you. The strongest thing you can do is be visibly willing to learn. Admit what's complicated. Acknowledge a fair point when they make one. And try to understand how they got to their conclusion, not to find the flaw in it, but because it's harder to dismiss someone you've actually followed. Counterintuitively, this is what builds the credibility that makes them take your points seriously. A person who concedes nothing convinces no one.

TRY *"What's the strongest version of your argument? I want to respond to that, not a weaker version of it."*

SKILL 04

Newton's Third Law applies to arguments

The harder you push, the harder someone pushes back. When a conversation starts feeling like an attack, people stop thinking and start reacting, and from that point nothing you say gets through. You can break the cycle. Name something you actually agree on, or acknowledge what they're feeling, before you say where you differ. This isn't backing down. It's the only way your actual point gets a hearing.

TRY *"I think we're both worked up because we both care about this. Can I share where I see it differently?"*

SKILL 05

Stop bringing facts to a feelings fight

Sometimes the person across from you isn't making an argument. They're expressing grief, fear, or anger about real suffering. Responding with data in that moment doesn't work. It signals you're not hearing what they're actually saying. This cuts both ways: you may also be carrying more emotion into the conversation than you realize, especially after October 7. You don't have to agree with how someone feels to acknowledge that they feel it. Often, acknowledging it is what opens the door to everything else.

TRY *"Before I respond to the specifics, it sounds like this is really personal for you. Am I reading that right?"*

Ready for more?

Everything in this pamphlet connects to a much larger conversation. Here's where to find it.

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