

## 1. What is the best response to someone saying, "You and your family are in our prayers"?

We want to respond to the *intentions* of the speaker, not from our own personal position on the power of prayer. Recognize the value of prayer to the speaker, who is offering something that (s)he considers to be a powerful intervention. The comment can create a relationship between the speaker and the receiver; the connection itself is a valuable gift. It may offer an opportunity for concrete action, even if it is simply starting a conversation.

Possible responses:

- "Thank you for your prayers! We can use all the help we can get."
- "That is so kind of you, I appreciate your support."
- If the speaker seems receptive to further engagement, one could add, "Do you want to hear about other ways you might help?"

## 2. What about the years of Israeli persecution of the Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank?

This is a challenge question. They are saying that the Palestinians have been victims. For a long time. It's hard to disagree with that. We should confirm this in our answer. List what we know. Acknowledge the truth in the statement. Then try to find out what is behind the question.

*Socratic to open dialogue: "Are you saying that persecution and occupation are synonymous?"*

- "We're struggling with the same concerns!"
- "Can you say more about your reason for asking this?"
- "Yes — there is a lot of bitterness among Palestinians about the years of occupation."
- "There are people who don't think Israel has the right to exist. What are your thoughts on this?"

## 3. Is there a way to separate politics from terrorism? What else could Hamas have done to protest persecution?

Both politics and terrorism have the power to polarize a society; both empower political extremes. **Politics** might, but need not, promote violence; **terrorism** does, by definition.

- The defining feature of the first part of three is the use of **violence**. This is the distinction between politics and terrorism. Terrorism and politics can be symbiotic. Even though Hamas presents itself as a political institution governing Gaza, its stated mission is to destroy Israel as well as the Jewish people. It is a terrorist organization in the guise of a political entity.
- Some observe that Israel's response, which is resulting in the death and destruction of civilians and communities, is an unavoidable feature of war and the only path to securing Israel's survival. Others believe that Israel's military response to Hamas' horrific acts of terrorism is in itself terrorism. Hamas's terrorism provoked Israel's response. It begs the question: what other options did Israel have?

- To protest persecution of Gazans, Hamas could have used their significant funds to take care of their own people. Instead of building tunnels and investing in weapons and training militants, they could have built hospitals and schools and improved the quality of life and security for their people. This might have cast Israel in a poor light by showing what was possible for the area.
- Hamas could have ceased the use of violence and worked with other parties to seek a lasting peace that recognizes Israel's and Palestinian's right to thrive. And taken nonviolent responsibility for the welfare of the Palestinian people.

#### 4. What can we do to help?

You can:

- Donate to front line charities
- Show up for pro-Israel gatherings
- Call your town leadership when you hear about antisemitic or anti-Israel gatherings
- Stop funding your alma maters that may be turning a blind eye (see news about the University of Pennsylvania, MIT, Harvard, etc.)
- Spread the word that terrorism isn't the answer to political unrest just as it isn't here in the U.S.
- Categorically deny any news that says:
  - Israel is ethnically cleansing
  - Israel targets civilians and tortures them
  - Israel kills children
  - Israel is doing what the nazis did
- Be alert for conspiracy theories and news from unreliable sources
- Write letters to the media and legislators
- Report incidents to the police, [FBI](#), and [ADL](#)

#### 5. What are the competing claims to the land? Were the Palestinians there first?

*Socratic question to open dialogue: "Wasn't Jesus a Jew?"*

- Go way back and Jewish people were there, e.g., they were conquered in 722 BCE and therefore lost the land. Beginning of "to the victors go the spoils."
- Area was ceded from the Ottoman Empire in 1923. The League of Nations declared Britain in charge to create a Jewish homeland alongside Arab nations.
- Palestinians attacked Jews during what was known as the Arab Revolt 1936-39 and then attacked again when Israel declared itself a state in 1948. The UN had issued a Partition Plan to divide the British Mandate territory between Jews and Palestinians, but the Palestinians did not agree to it and waged war.
- In 1948, Israel declared a state when Britain pulled out, and surrounding areas were attacked. Israel fended off attacks and annexed the land. "To the victor go the spoils" part 2 — noting that this was

a defensive activity based on other attacks, not a march forward, like Russia and Ukraine.

- The 1947-49 Palestine War ended with Jordan annexing the West Bank; Palestinians were given full citizenship and half the seats in parliament. Jordan lost the West Bank to Israel in the 1967 Six-Day War.
- Palestinians or their allies waged three wars against the Jews. Israel has defended themselves.
- Palestine has yet to establish a good working government for their people (cite the chance to be Jordanian citizens that was rejected).

## **6. How do we best explain our connection to Israel... that we're not more loyal to Israel than to the United States... that we're not uncritical supporters of the Israeli government's policies and actions?**

*Socratic question to open dialogue: "I'm a Jewish-American. What do you call yourself?"*

- We need to separate politics from terrorism. During 9/11, regardless about how you felt about the U.S. government, the attack swelled the surge of connection to the United States.
- Virtually every Jewish person has a personal connection to some family or friend, or friend's family who's living in Israel, and therefore gets personally impacted.
- Many Jews are as critical of Israel's administrations as other Americans. Israel's government does not speak for all Jews (or even all Israeli Jews).

## **7. How do we best explain the need for a Jewish homeland?**

*Socratic question to open dialogue: "Do you have a security guard at your place of worship?"*

- To discuss the need, we must recognize Jewish history, which is one of severe persecution, from slaves in Egypt to Maccabees to being persecuted in or pushed out from almost every country until now.
- Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs lists the base as food, water, and shelter first and safety next. Jews need a safe place to practice Judaism as a basic need.
- Right now, Jews, like other minority groups, live in a state of vigilance. What do you think it might feel like if you went to church under constant threat? Build empathy.

## **8. When does anti-Zionism become antisemitism?**

*Socratic question to open dialogue: "How would you define Zionism?"*

- Zionism, a concept that emerged in the late 1800s, refers to the establishment and maintenance of a Jewish state — now Israel — in the ancestral homeland of the Jewish people.

- Jews have lived on the land since somewhere between 1,200 and 2,000 BCE and possibly earlier.
- The state of Israel was proposed by the 1947 United Nations' Partition Plan ([Resolution 181](#)) following World War II, when many other new countries were created. This was a “two-state solution,” which was not accepted by the Arab community.
- Opposing Zionism, when it is seen as denying the right of Jews to have a Jewish state is widely considered to be antisemitic (based on hatred of Jews as a people). So statements like “From the river (Jordan) to the (Mediterranean) sea” — which is usually interpreted as replacing the Jewish state with a Palestinian one — is usually considered to be antisemitic. However, when it instead clearly represents the aspiration of Palestinians to reclaim some of the land lost in 1948 and 1967 after Arab-initiated wars, it might be seen as more of a wish than a threat.
- Criticizing Israel's governments prioritizing the rights of Jewish over non-Jewish residents of Israel is sometimes labeled anti-Zionism, and, as such, might not be labeled antisemitism, since it is opposition to actions of the Jewish state. Criticism of state policies, comparable with criticism that might be leveled at other states' policies, is not antisemitic per se.
- Criticism of Israel that draws on stereotypes, conspiracy theories, or generalizations about Jews is antisemitic. See the [International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance \(IHRA\) definition of antisemitism](#). This is an internationally accepted clarification of the term, which includes kinds of statements that would be considered to be antisemitic. It has been adopted by the State Department, the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, and many organizations and towns, including Sudbury and Stow.

## **9. What courses of action are available to the residents of Gaza to improve their lives — now, and after this war winds down?**

*Socratic question to open dialogue: “Why was Gaza in such bad shape before Israel responded to the 10/7 massacre?”*

- They might see that leaders like Hamas bring only bad things and use their contacts (and, now, a lot of worldwide sympathy) to create a “parliament in exile” overseas — who are readying themselves to take over control when Hamas is eliminated.
- They might consider that a two-state solution is the best they can hope for to gain full rights and the possibility to build a better future for themselves. Past leaders have rejected that option, or it was sabotaged by extremists.

## **10. How to respond to the statement that Israel is a colonialist enterprise?**

This is a challenge question, likely coming from an academically minded individual. Clarity on what they mean by using this description will be important — and a good deal of information about Israel's history relative to the Palestinians.

*Socratic question to open dialogue: “What does colonialist mean to you?”*

- Israel has a fair claim to the land on which it lies, based on thousands of years of Jews inhabiting it. Colonialists lack such a claim to the land they take over and/or exploit. This is not land that has abundant natural resources to attract a colonizer.
- Support for “a national home for the Jewish people in Palestine” from a major political power first came with the UK’s 1917 [Balfour Declaration](#). This was endorsed, after World War I ended, by the newly formed League of Nations.
- Although the state of Israel was finally secured in 1948 after winning a war brought on by her neighbors and took over land then occupied by Palestinians, the Palestinians and other Arab nations had refused to accept the 1947 Partition Plan (U.N. Resolution 181), which would have given them their own state.
- The displacement of Palestinians (referred to as the Nakba), which took place primarily after the foundation of the state of Israel, was a consequence of the Palestinians’ failure to accept the partition plan.
- In 1993, the Israeli government and Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO; now the Palestinian Authority) both agreed to implement a two-state solution as part of the [Oslo Accords](#), and the PLO recognized Israel’s right to exist and renounced terrorism. Israel, in turn, agreed to withdraw to its pre-1967 ([Six-Day War](#)) borders. The process was disrupted by extremists and other opponents of this solution — and by changes in regimes, including Hamas being elected to be the majority of the Palestinian Legislative Council in 2006. The U.S. has continued to attempt to broker agreements, which Israeli governments have generally supported, indicating a willingness to compromise.
- The West Bank settlements represent incursions on land that the settlers should not be claiming — so this could be seen as colonialism. Not every Israeli administration has accepted the legitimacy of these settlements.
- American critics of Zionism as “settler colonialism” should be reminded of U.S. history and so consider what might be done to improve the situation of Native Americans.