

## Taking the Temperature: Thinking about Israel Beyond the Elections

### Activity Packet

#### Introduction

In any democracy, Election Day has an important symbolic value. Beyond the utility of setting aside a single day for citizens to make decisions regarding representation and policy, election day is a symbolic way for democracies to 'take the temperature.' Election Day gives people the chance to consider: what are my hopes and fears? Who are the people that we trust to represent the public, to build policy for a better tomorrow? For many voters, the question might be better phrased – who are the people we hope will do the least damage to an unfolding future checkered by uncertainty?

Democracy is based on the principle that fateful decisions lie in the hands of the citizens. At the same time, Israel claims to be the national home of the Jewish people, including those whose home address is Boston or London or St. Petersburg. What does it mean to take seriously the notion that Israel belongs to Jews wherever they live while at the same time respecting the rights of Israeli citizens living in Israel – both Jews and non-Jews – to make the actual decisions of government and policy?

Israel's national elections (10 February 2009) offers Jews around the world an opportunity to **'take the temperature.'** In what ways is Israel important or unimportant in our lives? Do we see the Israeli elections as "ours" in any way? What are the issues that Israelis decide on at the polls that the many voices that make up the mosaic of Diaspora Jewry feel are the **big questions** that will help determine not only the future of the State of Israel, but the Jewish world writ large?

The conversation below offers an activity that can be done **in schools, in community centers, on campuses, at synagogues, and in living rooms** aimed at helping those of us who do not live in Israel to learn, to consider, and to discuss the significance of the issues that Israel faces **beyond the elections** and explore their importance for Jews no matter where they live.

## Preparing the Activity

The attached pages include brief outtakes from a variety of Israeli publicists in the days leading up to the elections. Each outtake is a different voice on a different issue. As a whole, they present a range – albeit incomplete one – of the issues that Israelis are thinking about towards Election Day, and that will continue to accompany us no matter which Israeli government is elected in on 10 February 2009.

Make copies of the quotations – one quotation per sheet of paper. You may also want to use the included hyperlinks to make copies of the actual articles. Hang the quotations around the room like a gallery. Under each quotation, place a small table with copies of the complete article. If you have more people in your group than there are quotations – make two sets of the article outtakes and make two stations for each quotation. You may also want to hang descriptions of the various Israeli political parties around the room as well. (See the pdf prepared by MAKOM that gives an overview of the major Israeli political parties and their respective platforms.)

## Materials Check List

- ✓ Taking the Temperature – Activity Explanation
- ✓ Taking the Temperature – Activity Thermometer (1 for each participant)
- ✓ Taking the Temperature – Quotations Gallery
- ✓ Copies of the various articles that are the basis for the quotations gallery.
- ✓ Taking the Temperature - Questions for a Conversation
- ✓ Party Platforms – Elections 2009 (see [makomisrael.net/elections2009](http://makomisrael.net/elections2009))
- ✓ Pencils and/or pens (for each participant)
- ✓ Construction paper (for mounting the quotations for the gallery)
- ✓ Computer, Projector, Speakers (for playing the election advertisements)
- ✓ Quotation from Gershom Scholem, "A Lecture on Israel."

## The Quotations Gallery

As people arrive for the activity, the election advertisements of the various political parties (with the English subtitles) can already be playing. The election advertisements can be found on line at: [makomisrael.net/elections2009](http://makomisrael.net/elections2009)

After people have arrived, make time for people to have a drink, a snack, and most importantly, time for people to introduce themselves.

Use the introduction above to help you frame a few thoughts and key questions for the discussion. In connection with the above introduction, the activity is not meant to be a seminar on Israeli politics, rather it is a chance to take part in an open, creative conversation about the possible meanings of Israel in our lives. The 2009

elections provide a convenient symbolic event to mark out a context for the conversation.

Each participant receives a copy of the attached sheet with the picture of the thermometer. Each participant is invited to tour the quotation gallery. As they go from quotation to quotation, they can map their reactions to the quotations along the thermometer... fears towards the low end and hope towards the high end...

- How did a particular quotation trigger your own thoughts regarding your fears and hopes for Israel's future?
- Jot down your reactions along the thermometer...

### The Conversation

After people have had an opportunity to tour the quotations gallery, and jot down their reactions, thoughts, and questions, (20 minutes) ask each people to form groups of four. As each person joins their quartet, they should take down from the wall the one article outtake that they found most striking, most relevant to their own personal sense of where Israel is at and where it should be going.

In the quartets, people will have time (20 minutes) to present their thermometers and share reactions, thoughts, and questions. Print the attached conversation questions on a sheet of paper so that each circle has a set of questions. The questions are a guideline for the conversation. Obviously, each conversation will have its own flow based on the choices of the participants.

### Wrapping Up...

Invite each quartet to join the larger group. Hand out copies of the page entitled – Wrapping Up...

**In Israel, the Jews have decided to dedicate their strength and vitality, their abilities and their hopes, to a common future, to one in which we will be prepared to carry full responsibility before man and God for our acts and our failures, for our accomplishments and – perhaps for our failures. This, in the final analysis, is the meaning of Israel for us.**

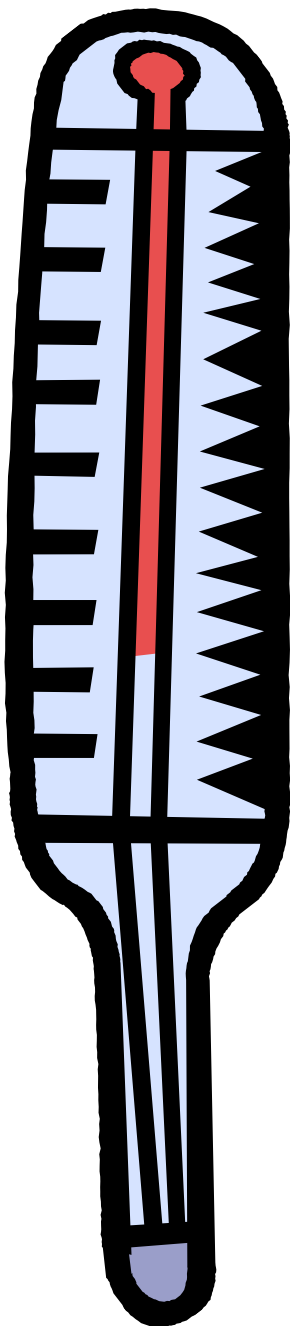
**Gershon Scholem.** "A Lecture on Israel." On the Possibility of Jewish Mysticism in Our Time & Other Essays." (NY,JPS) p. 37

- What about the quotation has the potential to invoke fear and what about has the potential to invoke hope?
- What does MAKOM's version of Gustave Dore's image of Jacob-Israel wrestling with the angel add to the conversation?

From the conversations in the small groups, does Scholem help us frame or contend with some of the fears and hopes that we discussed 'beyond the elections'?

שבט תשס"ט/Scott Copeland Feb-09/

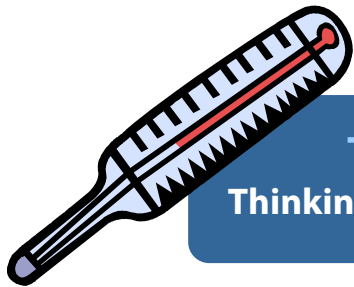
# Taking the Temperature: Thinking about Israel Beyond the Elections



**My hopes about  
Israel's possible future...**



**My fears about  
Israel's possible future...**



## Taking the Temperature: Thinking about Israel Beyond the Elections

### Quotations Galler

#### On the environment:

If there was a chance for environmental issues to become central to the elections, as they did in the United States, that chance was buried under the rubble of Gaza... in a survey done by the Geocartographic Institute for the Society for the Preservation of Nature, 50% of those surveyed said that environmental issues would be part of their decision making at the ballot box. An optimistic statistic, but to my mind, detached from reality. Some 110 Knesset seats will be cast for parties that for them 'environmental' is a dirty word.

Aviv Lavi, ['Elections outside the Green Line.'](#) NRGMaariv 2 February 2009 (Hebrew).

#### On the future of the conflict and the peace process:

Unfortunately, racist parties are an integral part of our region's political landscape. If Yisrael Beiteinu was part of a unity government, Hamas can be, too. Only a long-term cease-fire, accompanied by a real diplomatic context, can pull the rug of popular support out from under Hamas and restore it to its natural proportions.

Akiva Eldar, ['Not War by Other Means.'](#) Haaretz 2 February 2009.

What, meanwhile, does Israel want? For the 41-and-a-half years since the Six Day War, we have insistently not made our minds up, even as facts shifted inexorably on the ground. For much of that time we deluded ourselves that Arab intransigence to any notion of compromise rendered such a decision irrelevant. Our heads are in the sand even as it shifts. Of course, all other democracies strive to reconcile internal divides, but only in ours have the arguments, decade after decade, failed to produce a workable consensus as to the very contours of our nation.

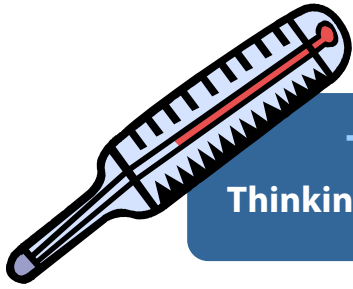
David Horovitz, ['\(Ducking\) the Decision Day.'](#) JPost 29 January 2009.

Defense Minister Ehud Barak already gave up half of Jerusalem at Camp David in 2000, and was willing to share sovereignty on the Temple Mount as well. Livni's and Olmert's teams are ready for something similar. Even Netanyahu is not exempt from questions: What, for example, does he plan to do with the legacy left to him by Olmert, Livni and Barak, who have already agreed to divide the city? Does he intend to do what he did in 1996, when he divided Hebron, or is he prepared to pledge now unequivocally that this legacy - agreement in advance to divide Jerusalem, of which Olmert has informed the Obama administration - does not obligate him, and that talks on dividing the city are unacceptable?

Nadav Shragai, ['The Public Has the Right to Know.'](#) Haaretz 28 January 2009.

Israel should base its policy toward the Palestinians on the track record of the last 100 years, and especially the last 15 years, which have featured the failure of Land-for-Peace on the Palestinian track. Lessons of recent history, Israel's minimal security requirements and the need to minimize motivation for Arab terrorism highlight the necessity to solidify Israel's control of Judea and Samaria.

Yoram Ettinger, ['The Palestinian Pandora's Box.'](#) Ynetnews 27 January 2009-02-02



## Taking the Temperature: Thinking about Israel Beyond the Elections

### Quotations Gallery (Continued)

#### On Israel as a Jewish-Democratic State

When we see rallies of solidarity with Hamas during war, when we hear mayors and Knesset members who are paid by the State congratulating Palestinian martyrs, and when we see Palestinian flags proudly hoisted in central Tel Aviv, we know the time has come to act. The time has come to convey a clear message to the next government: Without loyalty, one shall not be granted citizenship.

Arik Sinai, ['We'll Pay for our Court's Mistake.'](#) Ynetnews 22 January 2009.

While the incendiary taunts of increasing numbers of Jewish politicians, who demand - as a precondition for civic inclusion and rights - that Arab citizens constantly "prove" their loyalty and avow commitment to the state's Jewish character are wholly unfair, these un-Jewish, undemocratic and dangerous demands can only be overcome through a sustained democratic struggle. Extremist outbursts and lawlessness, however isolated, only serve the provocateurs.

A new civic awareness and improvement of Jewish-Arab relations will not threaten, but will rather reinforce Israel's unique status as national homeland to the Jewish people, by strengthening internal stability and reinforcing our international legitimacy.

Mike Prashker, ['Constructing Civic Consciousness.'](#) Haaretz 23 January 2009.

#### On Social Justice:

"Security is obviously a big concern, and people are still in shock after the war in Gaza," Dr. Amir Vatury, a leader of the Power to Workers Trade Union, which represents some 2,000 blue-collar workers, told The Jerusalem Post.

"Even if there were previously a rise in attention to socioeconomic issues, suddenly there is a war, and that focus changes," he continued. "It's not that poverty has suddenly ceased to exist or that the socioeconomic gaps in Israeli society have been solved. It's just that whenever there is a war in Israel, all these issues are swept under the rug."

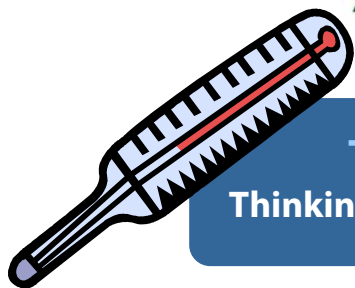
Ruth Eglash, ['No Shock Here: Social Issues Left Out of Election Campaign.'](#) JPost 1 February 2009.

#### On the Jewish Character of Israel:

One's Jewish worldview is not only a religious worldview. It is also a cultural and moral worldview, which does not have to be premised on Jewish law, but must be clearly present in the platforms of all parties; it must be heard and seen. We cannot keep on saying that we are a "Jewish democratic state" without giving some substance to this term.

We must stop being scared of uttering the word "Judaism" in its various conjugations: "Jewish state," "Jewish culture," and "Jewish worldview" – all of them must be given some Jewish substance. It could be secular Judaism, traditional Judaism, or religious Judaism; whatever is right for you.

Yael Mishali, ['What about Judaism?'](#) Ynetnews 29 January 2009.



## Taking the Temperature: Thinking about Israel Beyond the Elections

### Quotations Gallery (Continued)

#### On the spirit of our times:

We are tired of voting for lack of choice as the least of all evils. They say there is an alternative in the world, so why isn't there one here of all places? Barack Obama was not elected as a default choice but as an active choice, not as the least of all evils but as the very best there is.

Yossi Sarid, '[Our Democracy's Thin Lifeblood.](#)' Haaretz 30 January 2009.

#### Links to articles cited in the quotations gallery: (alphabetically)

Ruth Eglash, '[No Shock Here: Social Issues Left Out of Election Campaign.](#)' JPost 1 February 2009.  
<http://www.jpost.com/servlet/Satellite?cid=1233304645686&pagename=JPost%2FJPArticle%2FShowFull>

Akiva Eldar, '[Not War by Other Means.](#)' Haaretz 2 February 2009.  
<http://www.haaretz.com/hasen/spages/1060821.html>

Yoram Ettinger, '[The Palestinian Pandora's Box.](#)' Ynetnews 27 January 2009–02–02  
<http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-3662411,00.html>

David Horovitz, '[\(Ducking\) the Decision Day.](#)' JPost 29 January 2009.  
<http://www.jpost.com/servlet/Satellite?cid=1233050211276&pagename=JPost%2FJPArticle%2FShowFull>

Aviv Lavi, '[Elections outside the Green Line.](#)' NRGMaariv 2 February 2009 (Hebrew).  
<http://www.nrg.co.il/online/1/ART1/847/662.html>

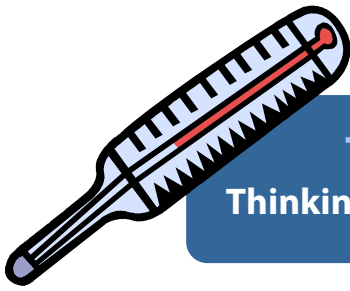
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<http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-3664060,00.html>

Mike Prashker, '[Constructing Civic Consciousness.](#)' Haaretz 23 January 2009.  
<http://www.haaretz.com/hasen/spages/1057982.html>

Yossi Sarid, '[Our Democracy's Thin Lifeblood.](#)' Haaretz 30 January 2009.  
<http://www.haaretz.com/hasen/spages/1060147.html>

Nadav Shragai, '[The Public Has the Right to Know.](#)' Haaretz 28 January 2009.  
<http://www.haaretz.com/hasen/spages/1059433.html>

Arik Sinai, '[We'll Pay for our Court's Mistake.](#)' Ynetnews 22 January 2009.  
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### Questions for a Conversation

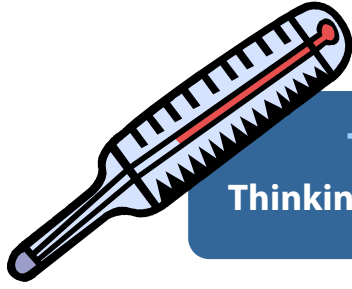
From the quotations that you considered from the gallery –

- What were examples of pieces that sparked your fears for Israel?
- What were examples of pieces that sparked your hopes for Israel?
- How did the same pieces spark both fear and hope?
- What are the issues that in your estimation are not represented in the quotations gallery and ought to be?
  
- In your estimation, among the many issue facing Israel, what is the issue that seems to you the most fateful in thinking about Israel's future?
  
- It is oft-times said and understandably so, that security issues trump all other issues on the Israeli national agenda. For a moment, take the security issue out of the deck. Security aside, what would say is the most fateful issue that Israel confronts towards the future?

Take a look at the issues that you marked along your thermometer.

- Would you differentiate between 'Israeli' issues and Jewish 'issues'?
- Are there issues that in your opinion are 'hands-off' issues for Jews not living in Israel?
- Are there issues that 'are too important' for Jews around the world that they should not be left to Israelis?





## Taking the Temperature: Thinking about Israel Beyond the Elections

### Towards Wrapping Up...

In Israel, the Jews have decided to dedicate their strength and vitality, their abilities and their hopes, to a common future, to one in which we will be prepared to carry full responsibility before man and God for our acts and our failures, for our accomplishments and – perhaps for our failures. This, in the final analysis, is the meaning of Israel for us.

#### **Gershom Scholem.**

“A Lecture on Israel.” On the Possibility of Jewish Mysticism in Our Time & Other Essays.” (NY, JPS) p. 37



**Jacob – Israel Wrestling with the Angel**  
(Based on the Gustave Dore -1855)

- What about the quotation has the potential to invoke fear and what about has the potential to invoke hope?
- What does MAKOM's version of Gustave Dore's image of Jacob-Israel wrestling with the angel add to the conversation?
- From the conversations in your small groups, does Scholem and the accompanying picture help us frame or contend with some of the fears and hopes that we discussed regarding Israel and us 'beyond the elections'?