

# INTRODUCTION

THIS GUIDE IS DESIGNED for young people who will be going on group trips to Israel.

It provides a way to explore Israel – before and after the trip – through a series of outstanding films. The films will add to your understanding of life in Israel and its remarkable history and culture, as well as the deep spiritual ties that Jews around the world feel toward Israel. The aim of this guide is to answer many of your questions and perhaps inspire you – in the best Jewish tradition – to ask new questions.

Session One traces the complex relationship between land, religion and people – from the nomadic tribe that established a kingdom in ancient Israel more than two millennia ago through the more recent events that brought a determined group of men and women back to their land again. You will read about the age-old connection to the land, the passions and politics that led to the establishment of the Jewish state in 1948 and the people who make up Israel's diverse population.

Session Two introduces Israel's young people. You will find that, in some ways, you have much in common with those who've grown up in Israel, and in other ways, your lives are very different. The films will illuminate something of what it feels like to live in a place where war and terrorism are serious, ongoing threats. We will also see Israel's distinctive history and culture from a young person's revealing vantage point, and we'll gain some insight into their dreams for the future.

In Session Three, we'll trace the roots of the ongoing conflict between Israelis and Palestinians. We'll look at the historical facts that will help put this crisis in context, and we'll try to see events from the viewpoints of people on all sides of the conflict. The films will further our understanding of the stories behind today's newspaper headlines.

Finally, in Session Four, we'll explore the larger implications of your trip, your own connection to the State of Israel, as an individual and as part of a community. In your visit, you will have encountered the rich complexities and joys of real life, and you'll have had opportunities to meet many people, and, we hope, plant seeds for relationships that will prove to be fruitful and enduring. Your own experiences will enhance your viewing of these films. In discussing the films, we'll also think about next steps: how to build on what you've seen and learned.

## **Learning Through Film**

Film can be a wonderfully accessible way to get to know any subject, and the films you see will bring to life many aspects of Israeli society and history discussed in the guide. A single frame of film can convey as much information as

many pages of type: Cinematic moments recreate the look and atmosphere of another time, make its issues immediate through a focused plot, and create empathy with compelling characters who move us. A particularly poignant image or scene can remain with you long after the lights come back on. On the other hand, film is a subjective medium that often appears to be objective. The filmmaker has a definite point of view, selecting scenes, dialogue, and camera shots according to the story he or she wants to tell.

Not only do films almost magically convey another period and place, they also provide a wealth of information about the assumptions that were prevalent when they were made. They provide a window into what people were thinking at a particular time, helping us to better understand current attitudes and future possibilities.

The evolution of Israeli cinema has reflected the evolution of Zionism itself, with its energetic debates about the nature of the Jewish state and the destiny of the Jewish people. In the modern era, films have given expression to the many layers of society in Israel. The history of Israeli cinema relates especially closely to the nation's political reality, frequently offering critical reflections on social imperfections or political distortions.

As you watch a film, be aware of how you feel while watching; you may want to quickly jot down any questions that come up that you want to think more about in the discussions afterwards. Also, think about when the film was made and what point of view it conveys about the events portrayed. Whatever the subtexts, however, these films will give you an entry into the intimate world of those who live in Israel today: how they grapple with issues of identity, and how they cope with internal and external pressures. We hope the films will provoke, challenge and inspire you – and bring you closer to Israel and to the spiritual and historical connections we all share.

Your first trip to Israel is the beginning of a long and meaningful relationship. May it grow and prosper and lead you to ever-rich discoveries of your heritage and your people.

### **How to Begin: Some Brief Guidelines and Suggestions**

We hope that you'll enjoy watching the films and engage in conversation about the many issues that are raised. The group should set aside a time to get together, and allow several hours to view a film and have a discussion. Each chapter – devoted to a session – includes a suggested film (the first one listed) and several alternates. Once you select a film (see the "Suggested Films" section), you should alert members of your group so that they can read the material in the chapter beforehand.

After viewing a film, one person should volunteer to lead the discussion, by posing some questions and then trying to make sure that everyone who wants to speak gets a chance to do so. You'll find a range of general discussion questions within each chapter, as well as additional questions about the specific films in the "Suggested Films" section. In a final session, you might want to spend time discussing the questions in the "Wrap-Up" section.

If you have one meeting scheduled before your trip, we suggest that you begin with Session One. For subsequent meetings, you might want to select a film in the following section, or, if you prefer, choose another from the first chapter. After you've returned from your trip, many of the images in the films will be imbued with new color and meaning.

You may want to view the films a second time, after you've had the opportunity to share your views and hear the opinions of others. One of the joys in watching films is that each time you watch, you're likely to see and feel something different. In fact, you may want to keep a film journal.

# SUGGESTED FILMS

## **SESSION 1: Welcome to Israel!**

*House on Chelouche Street.* The story of a Sephardic family in Tel Aviv during the British Mandate underlines some of the ethnic and generational tensions in the emerging State of Israel.

*Sallah.* The misadventures of a lovable scoundrel – a Sephardic Jew arriving in Israel in the fifties – are highlighted in this very funny satire.

*Operation Moses.* This documentary details the airlift of Ethiopian Jews to Israel in the 1980s.

*Black to the Promised Land.* A group of inner-city kids from Brooklyn spend ten weeks on an Israeli kibbutz; afterward neither the kibbutz nor the kids are the same.

*Wordmaker.* Eliezer Ben-Yehuda, who compiled the first modern Hebrew dictionary, is portrayed in this multi-dimensional biography.

*Cast a Giant Shadow.* Kirk Douglas stars as Mickey Marcus, the American Jewish colonel who became the first General of the Armies of Israel in 2000 years – and built the Israeli army into a winning force.

*Exodus.* The epic film about the events leading up to the 1948 War of Independence which is based in part on the actual events surrounding the *Exodus 1947*, a ship that defied British restrictions to bring Holocaust survivors to Palestine.

*Israel: A Nation Is Born.* The landmark series on the history of Israel features Abba Eban, Israel's eloquent statesman, who was an eyewitness to fifty years of Israel's history.

## **SESSION 2: Young People in a Young Country**

*Company Jamine.* This documentary follows the training of an elite company of female IDF officers, capturing their struggles, disappointments, and triumphs in their quest to participate to their fullest capacity in the army and all it represents.

*Out for Love . . . Be Back Shortly.* A young man searches for love and peace in present-day Israel, facing a conflict between the demands of his country and his own youthful needs and desires.

*Late Summer Blues.* A group of high school graduates spend a last, intense summer together before being drafted into the army, exploring the conflict between patriotism and personal fulfillment as well as universal themes of friendship and maturity.

### **SESSION 3: The Search for Peace**

*Operation Jonathan.* The daring 1976 raid at Entebbe, Uganda – after a flight from Israel had been hijacked and its Jewish passengers held hostage – is recreated in this thrilling dramatization. (Also known as *Operation Thunderbolt*.)

*As If Nothing Happened.* In this tense, emotional story that is all too familiar to many Israelis, a family awaits news about a soldier who may have been caught in a terrorist attack.

*Fictitious Marriage.* An Israeli laborer realizes he can break through the barriers of ethnic stereotypes when he is mistaken for an Arab laborer; he begins to view the world anew.

### **SESSION 4: Keeping the Connection Alive**

*Over the Ocean.* A story about an Israeli family considering immigration to Canada raises many issues about the importance of family, home, history, and connection to the Jewish people.

*Ido.* A young rock musician adopts a yeshiva lifestyle, to the great surprise and incomprehension of his friends and family.

*The Chosen.* An exploration of the reluctant but ultimately deep friendship between two Orthodox Jewish boys from very different backgrounds– one Hasidic, one modern orthodox – in 1944 Brooklyn, is based on the Chaim Potok novel.