

Israel Story Wartime Diaries discussion guide: Mor Maisel

On Oct. 7th, hundreds of Hamas militants broke through Israel's security barrier with Gaza and carried out a brutal rampage through towns and kibbutzim near the border: approximately 1,200 Israelis were murdered and about 240 were abducted into Gaza, including children and elderly individuals. It is believed that 129 remain there, not all of them alive.

In response, Israel mobilized 360,000 reservists and launched a ground offensive aimed at wiping out Hamas. According to Gaza health officials more than 20,000 people have been killed: a number which doesn't distinguish between civilians and combatants.

The region near Gaza which bore the brunt of the attack has for decades been home to many activists who promoted coexistence and greater rights for Palestinians. Overall, the population in the "Gaza envelope" was far more supportive of pursuing negotiations for a two-state solution than was the rest of Israeli society—which had moved to the right since the failure of peace talks with the Palestinians more than two decades ago. (Source)

Tolerance for peace activism had certainly been shrinking before October 7th, but the attack added significant pressure: not only shaking the peace movement, but raising questions about whether it has any future.

Activists in southern Israel, and elsewhere, who have long said, for instance, that Israel should engage with Hamas in peace talks, and that military action against Palestinians would not be productive, have been forced to rethink those beliefs in the aftermath of the worst massacre of Jewish people since the Holocaust.

Yet there are Israeli organizations and individuals speaking out against Israel's military operation in Gaza; some calling for a ceasefire; some engaging in activities, such as acting as human

shields for Palestinian farmers who face threats from Israeli settlers in the West Bank.

This discussion guide, based on Israel Story's episode: Mor Maisel, was released on October 19, 2023 as part of Israel Story's post-October 7th Wartime Diaries series.

Mor Maisel, a young woman who made Aliyah with her family when she was 18, grew up in Efrat, a Jewish settlement in the West Bank. She absorbed right-wing political views from her parents. Later, she journeyed from the far-right all the way to the far-left.

On October 7th, she was on a fun outing with friends, Palestinians and a Bedouin, when they heard about the Hamas attack. When this episode aired, Mor had not returned to Efrat. The reaction, to her political opinions, after October 7th, from family members and Jewish Israeli friends made it clear to her that she would not feel comfortable there.

DEFINITIONS:

- Hamas: an Islamic militant organization which aims to destroy Israel. It gained full control of the Gaza Strip in 2007, ousting the Palestinian Authority, led by Fatah, the party which governs Palestinians in the West Bank. Hamas has been recognized as a terrorist organization by dozens of countries, including the United States.

- Kibbutz: a collective community which operates according to the premise that all income generated by the kibbutz and its members goes into a common pool. ([Source](#))

- Arab-Israelis: Palestinians and others, such as Bedouins, who have Israeli citizenship.

EPISODE:

Clip #1: 1:28-1:47

QUESTION:

- Do you agree that fear of “the other” —people you’ve never met; about whom you’ve only heard negative and scary things — always eventually turns into hatred?

CLIP #2: 1:48-2:36

QUESTION:

- Have you ever changed your opinion about something important? If yes, what happened to change your mind?
- Why might Mor's conversations with Arabs in East Jerusalem have so tremendously influenced her opinions?

CLIP #3: 3:13-4:22

QUESTIONS:

- Is politics a uniting or dividing force in your own family? Can you imagine a political opinion so egregious that you would shun a family member who held it?
- Are there any circumstances in which the curses Mor's family made against her ("You need to go to Gaza," and "Soon by you!") might be justified?

CLIP #4: 8:53-9:34

QUESTION:

- Does the extraordinary level of anger revealed, after October 7th, by the words of an Israeli-Palestinian coexistence group member (that Mor belongs to) affect your position about the potential for a peace agreement between Israelis and Palestinians in the coming years?

- Mor describes her mixed Israeli-Palestinian friendship group as "miraculous." Do friendships that cross political lines feel miraculous to you? Why or why not?

CLIP #5: 9:35- 10:12

QUESTIONS:

- Is it understandable/justifiable that those who strive to be politically moderate revert to extreme positions during times of war and conflict? Why or why not?
- Did your own political opinions about Israel change as a result of October 7th? Did your convictions grow stronger or weaker?

GENERAL QUESTIONS:

- If you had the chance to talk with Mor, what questions would you ask?
- How did hearing Mor's voice help you better understand the current crisis?