

Empathy is not Exclusive: Enabling Ambassadors

Facilitator Guide

**How can we care about the Israeli captives while also displaying compassion towards innocent Palestinians in Gaza?
Is caring about one at the expense of the other?**

FRAMING THE ISSUE

Many of us find ourselves in situations where supporting Israel's right to defend herself and return the hostages is perceived to be at the expense of caring for the dignity of Palestinians.

This binary puts many humanitarian issues at the heart of the issue. Are we really advocating to care for the Israeli people by ensuring that innocent Gazans suffer?

This session models how this exact conundrum plays out using Polarities Thinking, demonstrating that empathy is not exclusive and that caring for ourselves doesn't have to be at the expense of caring for others.

LET'S EXPLORE

Opening

Facilitator introduces:

You've probably come across some of these sentiments online, in the news or in your community. Which resonate for you? Why?

- "Freeing the innocent Israeli hostages is the most important priority, even if it causes innocent Gazan suffering."
- "Israel's security is more important than the needs of Gazans right now."
- "How can we make meaningful progress towards a just and lasting solution in the region when Hamas continues to kill hostages, and also does not seem to care about the plight of the civilian Palestinians in Gaza?"

Info For Facilitator



Target Audience:

High school Teens, University Students, Adults



Length Of Program

30-45 minutes



Materials & Prep:

- Optical Illusion image to project on screen or send to participants
- Participants should each have four colored pens / markers: Red, Blue, Green and Orange
- Copies of the Polarity Map worksheet

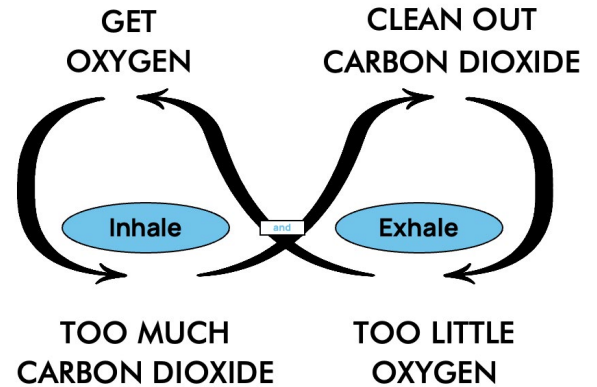
Polarity Thinking

Polarity Thinking is an approach that helps navigate complex situations by identifying what's at the heart of the matter, breaking down constraints of either/or binary thinking, and embracing a yes/and approach.

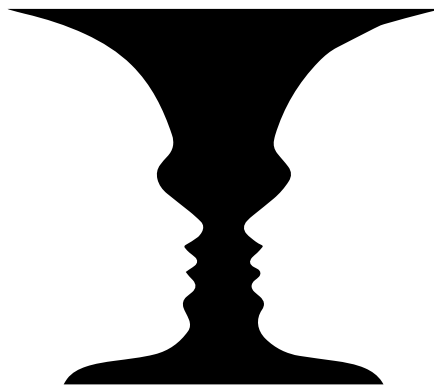
A polarity is defined as an ongoing problem with two (or more) correct answers that are interdependent.

To understand the concept of an 'ongoing problem', take a moment to focus on your breathing. A deep inhale will bring much needed oxygen to your body until the point that you've inhaled too much carbon dioxide. By exhaling, the carbon dioxide is cleaned out only to realize there's a lack of oxygen. Inhale again and the oxygen is replenished, exhale and the carbon dioxide is gone.

Repeat again and again and again.



Now, focus on this image:



Whether the goblet jumps out or you see the two faces at first, this optical illusion epitomizes a polarity: two images whose existence is directly impacted by the other. The only way to see one of the images is to focus on it at the expense of the other. In other words, they're interdependent, yet mutually exclusive.

Particularly Jewish and Universally Human

The Polarities framework suggests that each pole has to be embraced in the pursuit of a greater purpose. In the breathing example above, both inhaling and exhaling are necessary to live.

In the case of caring for our own people first while also caring for humanity at large, both are necessary for establishing a solid sense of self.

Stage 1

The following statements show why we might favor either of these sides. What additional points can you add?

Particularly Jewish

- Solidarity with my community (Peoplehood)
- Sense of belonging
- “You are my chosen people”

Universally Human

- Caring for all humans
- Empathy
- “All people are made in the image of G-d”

Stage 2

Now the Polarities framework adds one more layer. Standing in solidarity with the Jewish people and advocating for broader humanity in their truest sense cannot be experienced at the same time. We therefore have to be mindful of where we’re directing our attention. Too much energy favoring one pole will ultimately be at the direct expense of the other and will likely result in the following:

Only focusing on Particularly Jewish

- Xenophobia
- Triumphalism
- Isolation

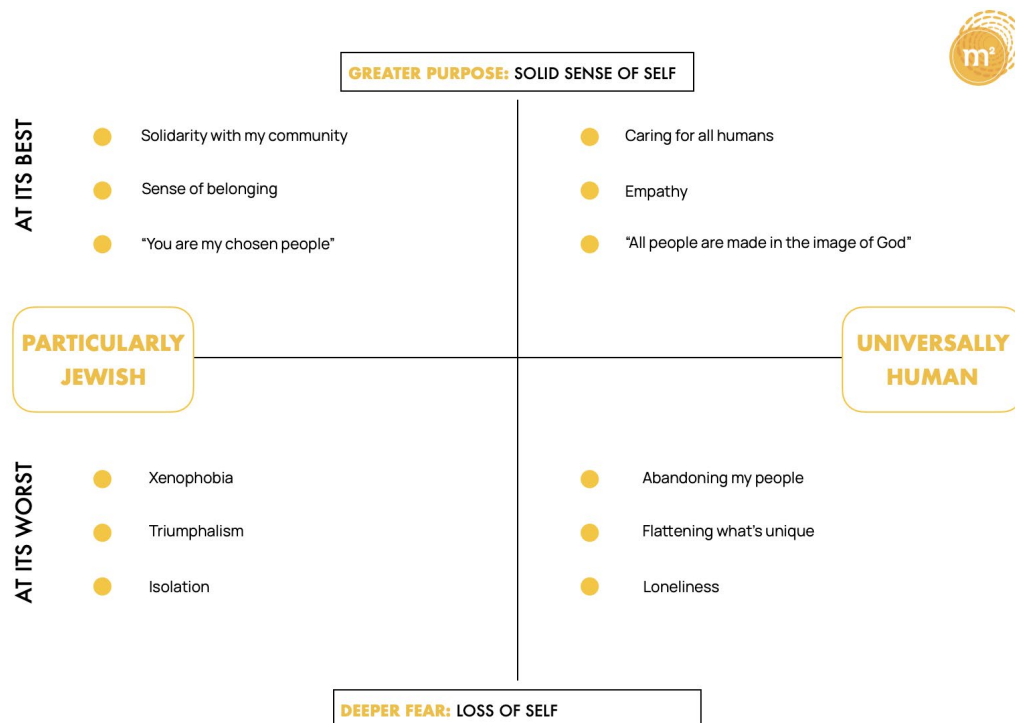
Only focusing on Universally Human

- Abandoning my people
- Flattening what’s unique
- Loneliness

The Polarity Map

- Facilitator gives out the worksheet to participants and explains:

Mapping these points on a Polarity map paints a compelling picture. There are many reasons why one might find themselves in a top quadrant, but staying there for too long – as in the case of a perpetual inhale – they’re destined to lose sight of the other pole and dip below the line into a negative dynamic. The antidote is to embrace the virtues of the opposite pole – even if only for a short while -- in service of the greater purpose.



Navigating the Map

Polarity Thinking is often misconstrued as seeking a middle ground to compromise between the two poles. Just as in the case of the goblet and the faces, both sides must get the full attention for what they are, recognizing their impact on the other.

True mastery over a polarity involves one’s awareness of where they are at a given moment, the knowledge of when and how to engage with the opposite pole, the ability to recognize warning signs that indicate a dip beneath the line, and the determination to take action in order to stay on top.

- Facilitator invites participants to chart themselves on the four quadrants of the map, at various points in time, using their red, blue, green and orange markers:

Chart yourself on the four quadrants above, using your different colored markers:

- In the initial aftermath of October 7th, which quadrant did you find yourself in? *Mark it by writing “Oct 7” in red marker.*
- Which other quadrants have you experienced since the onset of the war? *Mark them with your blue marker, by writing the date or noting the event when you experienced it.*
- Consider, what caused the shift between the different quadrants?
- What warning signs did you notice which indicated a dip towards a bottom quadrant? *Write them with your green marker.*
- What action steps did you take to return to, or remain in, a top quadrant? *Mark them with your orange marker.*

TAKE ACTION!

Call to Action: Become an Ambassador

- Given the Polarity way of thinking, craft a response to any of the quotes that appear at the beginning of this resource or any other sentiments you've come across where this model can be helpful in bringing complexity that breaks away from binary either/or thinking. Use the following as a point of reference:

"The return of the remaining innocent Israeli hostages is of utmost urgency, recognizing that there may be a heavy price to pay. Once they're home, we must work towards a fair and comprehensive solution which acknowledges the rights and concerns of Palestinians to achieve a lasting resolution to the conflict."

- Choose a social media platform where you can share your voice, post it and add the hashtag: #bringthemhomenow
- Use the Polarity Framework to process some of the other dynamics you're experiencing.

Some common themes that have emerged include:

- The desire to bear witness to this moment in history while preserving our wellbeing.
- The recognition that some aspects of our relationship to Israel will change while others should remain as they were.

CLOSING INTENTION

These are the two polarities I am struggling with right now:

1. _____
2. _____

- As a result of this exercise, one thing I am thinking about differently in my relationship towards advocating for the hostages is...

- As a result of this exercise, one thing I am thinking about differently in my relationship towards the plight of the Palestinians is...
