



Waltz With Bashir

"Begin with art, because art tries to take us outside ourselves. It is a matter of trying to create an atmosphere and context so conversation can flow back and forth and we can be influenced by each other." (W.E. B DuBois)

Waltz with Bashir is a great piece of art, and like many pieces of great art, it presents us with a powerful and disturbing emotional experience. Its creativity, honesty, and virtuosity is a reason to be proud of the Israeli film industry and Israeli society in general. At the same time, the film's content leaves us far more ambivalent. The film shows examples of Israeli soldiers' recklessness, callousness, and ineptitude, to say nothing of its portrayal of Israeli involvement in the Phalangist massacre of innocents in Sabra and Shatila refugee camp. At the same time, the individual Israelis in the film are human, vulnerable, confused and damaged young kids. While handling automatic weapons and driving wildly-firing tanks, they are, somehow, innocents.

What are we to make of a film like this?

We at MAKOM would suggest the last thing we should do is diminish the complexity of the experience. The film is neither for nor against Israel. It neither portrays Israelis in a good nor a bad light. The film demands an acknowledgement that life in modern Israel is far, far more complicated than that.

There may be a temptation to treat the film as a commentary on current events in Gaza. We would urge Jewish organizations not to be side-tracked into a political battle that would seek to strip art of its multivalency. We would suggest that we address the film in all its complexity, and take the opportunity it offers for sharing and clarifying the mixed emotions and ideas it sets flying.

This pack is made available to you for no cost from MAKOM - the Israel Engagement Think-Practice Tank for the Jewish Agency, Jewish Communities, and the Jewish world. It is our mission to enable the reimagining of Israel in Jewish life. To engage in more of our thinking please visit our site that we run with Haaretz newspaper - makom.haaretz.com.

We also thank the Koffler Arts Center of Toronto, The Pittsburgh Jewish-Israeli Film Festival, The Miami Jewish Film Festival, The University of Judaism, and the Skirball Adult Learning Center for their wise advice. Finally we tip our hats to the Foundation for Jewish Culture, that is not only full of incredible people committed to the value of the arts in Jewish life, and whose consultant Carole Zawatsky helped us greatly, but mainly because The Foundation for Jewish Culture's Lynn and Jules Kroll Fund for Jewish Documentary Film had the admirable wisdom and foresight to give significant funding for the creation of Waltz with Bashir itself

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What do you have here?

The Handout - for anyone seeing the film

This is made up of three

1. **The 'program'** - a one-pager to read prior to the screening. It acts as an introduction to the film, and presents some brief background information that may aid comprehension.
2. **The FAQ and more sources of information** - this is a collection of FAQ, links and references for those who wish to study more.
3. **The Kahan Report** - the Israeli government commissioned an investigation into Sabra and Shatila headed up by Chief Justice Kahan. This is a collection of extracted quotations from the report.

The Discussion Guide -

For the facilitator of post-screening discussion

A few tips:

- Don't jump into a discussion the moment the film ends! If you can, let people breathe, have a coffee (or a whisky!), recover themselves, before expecting them to express themselves intelligibly. If you have less time, then at the very least don't begin until the credits have rolled until the very end. This way you give honor to the creators, and allow the swirling emotions to settle at least slightly.
- Don't expect yourself to know the 'answers', in fact don't expect there to be 'right answers' at all! This activity tries to allow people to begin to face, address, and learn to live with the questions this film sets fire to. As a result, the conversation may at times turn painful, or uncomfortable. That's okay. It's allowed. After all, a true dialogue doesn't demand consensus: true listening may result in understanding but not necessarily agreement.
- If you have access to the room beforehand, you may wish to print out the character/quotes, and stick them on the walls.

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- For a non-facilitated discussion activity, we also include this guide in the form of a place-mat. You can place these at tables, and allow them to inform the conversations that arise.

The Study Sheets

for further exploration at another date

We don't suggest using these sheets on the same night as the screening. These are for digging deeper into issues raised by the film at another time. Both study sheets address the moral questions surrounding the idea of indirect responsibility. The first draws on traditional sources referred to by the Israeli Government Commission on Sabra and Shatila run by Chief Justice Kahan, and the second draws from more contemporary Israeli sources. The sheets are accompanied by a facilitator's guide with some leading questions.

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