



LIKE DREAMERS

THE STORY OF THE ISRAELI PARATROOPERS
WHO REUNITED JERUSALEM AND DIVIDED A NATION

STUDY GUIDE

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Introduction

In *Like Dreamers*, acclaimed author and journalist Yossi Klein Halevi interweaves the stories of a group of 1967 paratroopers who reunited Jerusalem, tracing the history of Israel and the divergent ideologies that shaped it from the Six-Day War to the present.

Following the lives of seven young members from the 55th Paratroopers Reserve Brigade, the unit responsible for restoring Jewish sovereignty to Jerusalem, Halevi reveals how this band of brothers played pivotal roles in shaping Israel's destiny long after their historic victory. While they worked together to defend Israel in 1967, and continued to defend it through subsequent wars, these men harbored drastically different visions for Israel's future.

Some became leaders of the post-1967 settlement movement, while others became active in the peace movement that opposed settlements.

Like Dreamers offers a nuanced, in-depth look at the conflicting beliefs that continue to confront Israeli society, raising compelling questions about Israel's future. Some of those questions are offered below, as suggestions for thoughtful conversation about the emotionally charged issues confronting Israel's friends around the world.

Israeli Society: Between Competing Values

1. How do the cultural and ideological backgrounds of the protagonists affect their political perspectives? Based on the characters of this book, are we prisoners of our backgrounds or can we transcend them?
2. What traits and ideals unite these men? Who among the protagonists are the exceptions to that basic consensus?
3. How have the protagonists grappled with the moral dilemmas of the Palestinian problem?
4. Did you find yourself sympathizing with characters whose politics you disagree with? Did the book help you understand their positions?
5. *Like Dreamers* is written in a style that adopts the worldview of whatever character is being discussed. Does the author manage to maintain this impartiality or are there instances where his own biases come through?
6. The settlement movement set as one of its goals to preserve the "Spirit of '67." What is that spirit as opposed to the "Spirit of '73?" How did these two opposite sensibilities shape contemporary Israel?

7. General Erez, responsible for the evacuation of Yamit, says to his soldiers: “Those resisting withdrawal aren’t more Zionist than those who evacuated them, and they don’t love Israel more than we do.” (page 379) Which protagonists—on the left as well as the right—view themselves as “more Zionist” than others? Do you agree?
8. “They argued constantly, Israeli style—not to convince an opponent but to bolster one’s certainties.” (page 57) Is this attitude evident among the main protagonists?
9. Though there are sometimes heated confrontations among the book’s protagonists, they tend to deal with each other with surprising civility. How does the army as an institution contribute to this sense of solidarity despite differing backgrounds and beliefs?
10. As Yoel Bin-Nun leads his students on a tour of the Jerusalem battleground, the author writes: “Yoel had come to regard the peace movement and the movement for greater Israel—the two camps that had tried to determine the results of the Six-Day War—as utopian fantasists ... And yet each camp had expressed something essential about Jewish aspirations.” (page 535) What Jewish aspirations are being expressed by the camp you disagree with?
11. The period from the beginning of the Oslo process in 1993, until the assassination of Yitzhak Rabin in 1995, marked the nadir in Israeli political civility. The debate over Oslo was perceived by both left and right as a matter of life and death. How could that struggle have been better managed? How did Rabin’s dialogue with Yoel Bin-Nun provide a model for a way in which Jews could disagree?
12. The fault lines between left and right, Orthodox and secular are well known. How did fault lines develop *within* each of Israel’s rival camps? Which of the protagonists represent these fault lines? And do those internal fault lines help soften the divides between Israel’s rival ideologies?
13. Each side of Israel’s territorial debate insists that it is speaking from a place of authentic Jewish values. What are those values, and how do the protagonists attempt to reconcile their values with their opponents’?
14. Show examples of how the protagonists validate and sometimes even adopt the values of their rivals.

Between Kibbutz and Settlement: The Fate of the Israeli Dream

1. “For the founders of Ein Shemer, physical labor was an act of devotion, virtually a religious ritual.” (page 6) Explain the spiritual aspects of the kibbutz movement.
2. The Zionist movement wanted to normalize the Jewish people’s place in the world. How did the interplay between the ancient Jewish longing for transcendence—to be a “kingdom of priests and a holy people”—but also for normalization—to be a “nation among nations”—affect the evolution of Israel?
3. Describe the relationship between the kibbutz movement and the settlement movement. What were the tensions between them, what were the similarities?
4. “Both movements saw the Jewish return home as an event of such shattering force that something grand—world transformative—must result.” (page xxiii) How did the kibbutz movement and the settler movement each attempt to transform mundane politics into utopian politics? What were the consequences of that transformation on Israeli society and on the Zionist dream?
5. What were the key moments in the process through which the Israel symbolized by the kibbutz became the Israel symbolized by the settlement?
6. Why did the kibbutz movement falter? What are the “kibbutz values” that Avital Geva is trying to preserve and transmit?
7. Arik Achmon refused to take part in his kibbutz graduation ceremony. How does Arik see the clash between individual needs and communal responsibilities? How does his individualistic personality affect the course of his life?
8. The settlement movement sees itself replacing a faltering kibbutz movement as the source of inspirational Zionism. How successful has the settlement movement been in that attempt?

Between Dream and Reality

1. “When the Lord returned the exiles of Zion, we were like dreamers,” writes the Psalmist. In what ways do the book’s protagonists continue to try to fulfill a dream? In what ways do they yield to reality?
2. The young men who fought in 1967 and 1973 helped shape contemporary Israel. What are the positive and negative effects of the influence of that generation?
3. Daniella Weiss, a leader of the settler movement, declares to Arik and Yehudit that “We’ve won on every front. Except for one: we haven’t managed to convince people like you. That will come, of course, the more everyone realizes we’ve reached the point of no return.” (page 360) What is the “point of no return” that Daniella is referencing? And is the state of Israel approaching that point?
4. Just before Arik Achmon sets off for Lebanon to fight in yet another war, the author writes: “In a normal country, a forty-nine-year-old CEO doesn’t go off to battle. But you deal with the reality you’ve been given. Arik knew no better definition of Zionism than that.” (page 384) What are the protagonists’ different attitudes toward a “normal” Israel?
5. One recurring phrase in this book is: “He had a plan.” The protagonists seem to constantly have some grand plan to shape the Israeli future. How do these plans compete? How do they energize Israel and how do they deplete it?

Sovereignty and Power

1. How do Arik Achmon and Yisrael Harel differ in their understandings of the meaning of a sovereign Jewish state? Rabbi Amital and Hanan Porat?
2. Udi Adiv’s contempt for Zionism, writes the author, “proved Zionism’s success. Only Zionist empowerment could have made young Jews feel safe enough, barely twenty-five years after the Holocaust, to despise Jewish power.” (page 162) Has the occupation undermined the legitimacy of Jewish power? Or does the siege imposed against Israel by many of its neighbors justify an Israeli hard line?
3. Does the Kookian vision of redemptive Zionism, espoused by the Mercaz Harav Yeshiva, enhance or undermine the notion of Jewish sovereignty?
4. Based on their reactions to the dismantling of Yamit and the development of their individual ideologies, how do you think Hanan Porat, Yoel Bin-Nun, and Yisrael Harel reacted to the 2005 unilateral disengagement from Gaza?

The State of the State: Where To?

1. Though they differ greatly in worldview, the main protagonists hardly represent all of Israeli society. Instead they emerge from the same Ashkenazi Zionist “tribe.” Which of Israel’s “tribes” are missing from the book? How did the relative absence of their voices in Israeli discourse over the years affect Israeli policies? What impact are those emerging voices having on Israel today?
2. Does the book leave a hopeful message about the future of Israel and Zionism?
3. The author has said that the characters in this book can be divided into two groups: those who evolved both personally and ideologically and those who more or less remained the same. Does that correspond with your experience of the characters? If so, how would you divide them? Which character’s evolution most represents that of the State of Israel?
4. One way of viewing these characters and their beliefs is that each represents another facet of Israel’s “personality.” What is the personality of the State of Israel that emerges from this book?
5. For much of Israel’s history, the dream of utopia in Zionism was an energizing force. What positive or negative consequences did utopian longings have on Israeli development? What is the state of that dream in Israel today?
6. According to the conclusion of *Like Dreamers*, after four decades of left-right schism, most Israelis have become political centrists. How would you define an Israeli centrist position on the territories? What were the processes that brought about the emergence of the center? And which characters become part of that process?
7. Meir Ariel builds a sukkah near the Tel Aviv beach. How does his approach to Judaism reflect a modern Israeli sensibility? Does he represent reconciliation between “the mountain and the coast”? Why have young Israelis adopted him as a hero and cultural role model?
8. The author writes: “And so the new dreams of Zion—socialist perfection, the wholeness of the land, even the seemingly modest dream of normalizing the Jews as a nation among nations—had each successively faltered. The Messiah was still tarrying.” (page 537) Do any of these dreams remain relevant? Are new Israeli dreams emerging?