

# WALTZ WITH BASHIR

AN ARI FOLMAN FILM

## THE MAKOM VIEWER'S GUIDE



created by

**Makom**   
Renewing Israel Engagement

in collaboration with

FOUNDATION  
FOR JEWISH  
CULTURE

## FOR FACILITATORS *What Do You Have Here?*

### The Handout - for individual viewers

*For anyone seeing the film*

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 and 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 honor 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 raises. 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.
- For a non-facilitated discussion activity, we also include this guide in the form of a placemat. 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 Commission on Sabra and Shatila run by Chief Justice Kahan, and the second draw from more contemporary Israeli sources.

The sheets are accompanied by a facilitator's guide with some leading questions.

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"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 work of art, and like many works 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 men. Even while handling automatic weapons and driving wildly-firing tanks, they are, somehow, innocents.

## What are we to make of a film like this?

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

There may be a temptation to treat the film as a commentary on current events in Gaza. We urge Jewish organizations not to be side-tracked into a political battle that would strip art of its multivalency. Rather, we hope to 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](http://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 several years ago

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## WARM-UP QUESTIONS

These two first exercises don't necessarily advance any particular subject. What they do succeed in doing is to allow everyone to speak, and in hearing everyone's short comments it allows everyone to realize the vast range of experiences and emotions that the film evoked. It tends to open people up to the idea that the film could mean many things.

In one word , sum up your feelings after the movie



Give two sentences - one ending with an exclamation mark, and one ending with a question mark - that you are left with after the film



This particular question is intended to brush up against the full intent of the director - in the end, is the film about Ari's trauma, or about the massacre itself? It is far too early to ask this question up front - nor might the direct question have a useful answer - instead this seemingly-specific question may allow those who perhaps feel the film is 'unsatisfying', or 'anti-Israel', to clarify some of their thinking

How might the film have been changed for you, if the final scene had returned to Ari Folman sitting drinking with Boaz making sense of his dream, rather than the live footage from the massacre?

## QUESTIONS



“Maybe I'll discover things about myself that I don't want to know?”

Did the film uncover things for you that you didn't want to know?



How does the film leave you feeling about Israel and Israelis?

[Don't be afraid of the answers here. All responses are legitimate and informative.]



Is this a film you'd like your Jewish friends to see? Is it a film you'd like your non-Jewish friends to see?

[Ask people to elaborate upon their responses, and hear them out.]



“You were going to win the Nobel Prize...”

“At age 20 I couldn’t be anything at all...”

At a conservative estimate, at least one in ten Israeli men of that generation took part in the Beirut operation, similar to the characters in the film.

How do you think this complex kind of suppressed trauma affects a society?

[You might even wish to take this act of creative empathy a stage further. Just imagine - nearly every Israeli between the ages of 40 and 50 who is living outside of Israel now, probably lived through the moral turmoil of Sabra and Shatila...]



“Can’t films be therapeutic?”

Did you find this film to be therapeutic?

[Let people define for themselves what 'therapeutic' means in this context. It's clear that the film is in some sense trying to be therapeutic for Ari. But does it in any sense 'heal' the audience? Of what?]



What do you think was the purpose of this film?  
What is it trying to 'do'?



Were you left feeling that Folman had forgiven himself by the end?



“Did you fire the flares?”

“What does it matter?”

Ari Folman's character does not feel there is a moral difference between sending flares, standing by others sending flares, or committing the murders themselves. Do you?

Do you think there is a moral difference between the murderers, and those who inadvertently helped them?

[Amos Oz once said that in a world lacking black and white moral clarity, our task is to differentiate between shades of grey. If you find this conversation to be fruitful, you might choose to suggest a follow-up session exploring this issue further with the study text sheets.]

## QUESTIONS



“Massacre is not stored in my system.”

Though Ari and his friends return to the comment above, it appears that an earlier massacre - the Holocaust - is very much stored in Ari's system.

How does his inherited memory of the Holocaust play out in Ari's struggle with what happened in Lebanon?

Does your knowledge of the Holocaust color your reading of the film?

Would you say that the Holocaust affects your understanding of Israel, Israel's actions, and Israelis in general?

[This may be a question too far for participants with little prior knowledge of Israel, so don't push for a response. Simply asking the question may be enough to set a line of thinking running about the connection between the Holocaust and the State created 3 years later.]



## WARM UP QUESTIONS:

Give one word to sum up your feelings after the movie

Give two sentences – one ending with an exclamation mark, and one ending with a question mark – that you are left with after the film

How might the film have been changed for you, if the final scene had returned to Ari Folman sitting drinking with Boaz making sense of his dream, rather than the live footage from the massacre?

1



*"Maybe I'll discover things about myself that I don't want to know?"*

Did the film uncover things for you that you didn't want to know?

How does the film leave you feeling about Israel and Israelis?

Is this a film you'd like your Jewish friends to see?

Is it a film you'd like your non-Jewish friends to see?

2



*"You were going to win the Nobel Prize."  
"At age 20 I couldn't be anything at all..."*

At a conservative estimate, at least one in ten Israeli men of that generation took part in the Beirut, just like the characters in the film.

How do you think this complex kind of suppressed trauma affects a society?

3



*"Can't films be therapeutic?"*

Did you find this film to be therapeutic?

What is it trying to 'do'?

What do you think was the purpose of this film?

Were you left feeling that Folman had forgiven himself by the end?

4



*"Did you fire the flares?"  
"What does it matter?"*

Ari Folman's character does not feel there is a moral difference between sending flares, standing by others sending flares, or committing the murders themselves. Do you?

Do you think there is a moral difference between the murderers, and those who inadvertently helped them?

5



*"Massacre is not stored in my system."*

Though Ari and his friends return to this comment, it appears that an earlier massacre – the Holocaust – is very much stored in Ari's system.

How does his inherited memory of the Holocaust play out in Ari's struggle with what happened in Lebanon?

Does your knowledge of the Holocaust color your 'reading' of the film?

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