

FEDERATION'S

# Imagine ISRAEL

## PODCAST

## Podcast Discussion Guide



### IMAGINE ISRAEL

#### Connect to Israel and Israelis through the lens of social change

The Jewish Federation of Greater Washington's Imagine Israel is an initiative designed to engage Washingtonians with Israel and Israelis through a wide variety of programs focused on issues of social justice and civil society.

### PODCAST

Federation's Imagine Israel Podcast directly connects you to a modern, relatable Israel in real-time through stories from innovative Israeli influencers leading social change in the start-up nation.

### DISCUSSION GUIDE

This discussion guide can be used as a reference to spark conversation and explore social issues in Israel and at home through interactive discussion and activities.

#### How to use the discussion guide:

- **Adults:** Podcast Discussion Party with friends (take your book club to the next level)
- **Educators:** Use as curriculum in your classroom
- **Rabbis:** Share with your congregations
- **Education Directors:** Discuss with your teachers
- **Parents:** Start conversations with your children



The Jewish Federation  
OF GREATER WASHINGTON

[shalomdc.org/imagineisraelpodcast](https://shalomdc.org/imagineisraelpodcast)

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The Jewish Federation of Greater Washington supports Incorporate Israel through a \$40,000 allocation.

### Meet Avner Stepak Disability inclusion advocate

**Hear** his story

**Learn** about his impact

**Discuss** social change

Imagine Israel Podcast Episode 3:  
[shalomdc.org/israels-invisible-population](http://shalomdc.org/israels-invisible-population)

Avner Stepak, former CEO of the second largest investment house in Israel, is revolutionizing Israel's corporate world to include the previously overlooked population of individuals with disabilities. Stepak strives to create jobs that mutually benefit businesses and individuals with disabilities.

In 2016—through a program of the Joint Distribution Committee, Israel's Ministry of the Economy and the Ruderman Family Foundation—Stepak established Incorporate Israel, an organization that helps Israelis with disabilities join the corporate world by working closely with top staff at Israel's biggest companies to fight prevalent stigmas and raise awareness.

### After listening to Federation's Imagine Israel Podcast, what's your opinion?

1. "[Joining the Israeli economy] is an issue of human rights, not charity. The right to be employed is something very basic that everyone should have, whether they have a disability or not," says Avner of Israel's workforce.  
  
How do you distinguish between an act of loving kindness (*chesed*, *gemilut chassadim*) vs. justice (*tzedek*)? What difference would the classification make to a society and to legal issues? How would it fulfill the promise of Israel's Declaration of Independence with its aspiration to be a State for all its citizens?
2. Incorporate Israel, or in Hebrew, *Esek Shaveh*, is a play on the literal meaning, "equality work," with the deeper meaning of "a worthy enterprise." How is this title linked to Avner's theory that the Israeli economy is actually losing by not employing people with disabilities? How may this issue and Avner's response bring new texture to the concept of Israel as a "Startup Nation?" How could this be social entrepreneurship?
4. Language matters in Judaism and in society (*dibburim*, words, are related to *devarim*, concrete items). What changes in language dealing with disabilities have you seen over the past decade in American society? What could be a challenge in Israel since Hebrew is also an ancient language? How would biblical and liturgical texts be affected?
5. Avner pointed out that change in Israel is being driven in part by government-imposed regulations. What type of protections does the Americans with Disabilities Act afford individuals with disabilities? Religious institutions in the USA are exempt from some of the requirements of the ADA. Should religious institutions be exempt? What is the responsibility of religious institutions to include individuals with disabilities?



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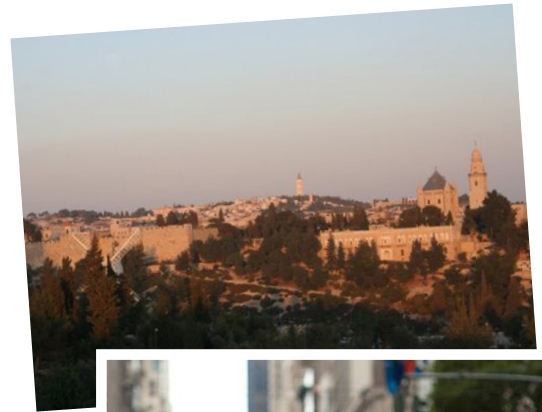
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## General Questions:

1. Read the excerpt from the Israeli Declaration of Independence, below. From what you hear on the news and media, do you think the document is an actual guideline or an aspirational standard?

"THE STATE OF ISRAEL will be open for Jewish immigration and for the in-gathering of the Exiles; it will foster the development of the country for the benefit of all its inhabitants; it will be based on freedom, justice and peace as envisaged by the prophets of Israel; it will ensure complete equality of social and political rights to all its inhabitants irrespective of religion, race or sex; it will guarantee freedom of religion, conscience, language, education and culture; it will safeguard the Holy Places of all religions; and it will be faithful to the principles of the Charter of the United Nations."

2. How does this podcast episode affect your perspective of Israel? How may you explore this topic further?
3. How does the issue addressed in this episode relate to you as a Jew living in DC?
4. How would you share this aspect of Israel with others to engage them in a conversation about Israel?
5. Did you learn anything new about Israel? Did anything surprise you?
6. Based on what you heard in this podcast would you describe Israel as a Jewish, democratic or Zionist state?



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## Interactive Activities

1. Avner talked about the concept of making sure you have the right person in the right job. Think about a time when you have been on a team or part of a collaborative project; how important was it to have the right person responsible for specific jobs or tasks?

In the “[Making of a Mensch](https://letitripple.org/films/making-of-a-mensch)” ([letitripple.org/films/making-of-a-mensch](https://letitripple.org/films/making-of-a-mensch)) video, Tiffany Shlain suggests that values such as wisdom, courage, humanity, justice, temperance and transcendence are the most important characteristics. Did you find these types of characteristics displayed by those that you worked well with? Can most people, irrespective of a disability, develop these characteristics?

Choose an activity for a growing data base of online [Inclusion Activities](https://shalomdc.org/inclusionactivities) ([shalomdc.org/inclusionactivities](https://shalomdc.org/inclusionactivities)). Debrief about how it affected your understanding of disability inclusion and Jewish values. Some recommendations from this list that are especially relevant to this podcast:

- Requesting Accommodations
  - Redefining Disabilities
  - Learning From Our Stories
  - Sticker Quotes
2. Zionism has been primarily defined as the movement of restoring the Jewish people to the land of Israel. Einat Wilf writes, “Zionism was a rebellion against Jewish passivity. To the Jewish people, Zionism carried the message that they need not wait for the Messiah. Rather, they should be their own Messiahs. Zionism, born of the enlightenment, embodied the idea of human agency. Rather than wait for God or Messiah to bring about their salvation, Zionism called upon the Jewish people to be the vehicles of their own redemption... humans were active agents, capable of changing the course of their private and collective futures.” In what ways could changemakers like Avner Stepak and others featured on our podcasts, be considered good examples of Zionists?
  3. How do you understand the situation where the HR department claimed that there were no applicants with disabilities? Generate a few strategies for a business or NGO making its workforce and HR pathways more accessible.

