Few films in recent memory have sparked as much attention and debate in the pro-Israel community as *The Gatekeepers*. Through the most unimpeachable of voices—the six living former heads of the Shin Bet, Israel's internal security service—the film underscores the urgent need for a resolution to the ongoing conflict, for Israel's own sake.

The following is a guide for holding a productive post-film discussion, guided by a facilitator. Please note that another option for the post-film discussion is to bring a speaker or a panel of speakers. This guide is intended primarily for post-film programs that do not include a speaker. However, the handout at the end of the packet can be distributed at events with or without a speaker.

**Official film website:** sonyclassics.com/thegatekeepers  
**J Street webpage featuring the film:** jstreet.org/the-gatekeepers

Note: *The Gatekeepers* is a film directed by Dror Moreh and distributed by Sony Pictures Classics and was not created by or for J Street.
SYNOPSIS

*The Gatekeepers* (Dror Moreh, 97 min, 2012)
Charged with overseeing Israel’s war on terror—both Palestinian and Jewish—the head of the Shin Bet, Israel’s secret service, is present at the crossroad of every major decision. For the first time ever, six former heads of the agency agreed to share their insights and reflect publicly on their actions and decisions. *The Gatekeepers* offers an exclusive account of the sum of their success and failures. It validates the reasons that all six came to reconsider their hardline positions and advocate a conciliatory approach toward their enemies based on a two-state solution.

SUGGESTED AUDIENCE

The program can be adapted for small gatherings of 5-15 people as well as medium (15-40) and large (40+) ones. The target audience is individuals who care deeply about the state of Israel and would appreciate having a supportive environment in which to process the challenging content of the film. In addition to current J Street supporters, the outreach for this program should focus on community members and leaders who do not necessarily identify as J Street supporters.

SUGGESTED FORMAT

The program should be led by a facilitator. The space should be conducive to discussion in pairs, small groups, and with the whole group. In other words, the space should have a reasonable decibel level, movable chairs, and good sight lines to the facilitator and other participants.

TIME

One-hour post-film discussion

MATERIALS

- Handouts (see end of packet)

FACILITATOR PREP

- If possible, though not required: see *The Gatekeepers* prior to the event
- Review the suggested discussion questions
- Familiarize yourself with J Street’s policy positions (www.jstreet.org/policy/policy-positions)

PROGRAM OVERVIEW

- Part I: Introduction (10 min)
- Part II: Pair Discussion (15 min)
- Part III: Large Group Discussion (30 min)
- Part IV: Closing (5 min)
- Handout
Part I: INTRODUCTION (10 min)

Why We're Here
Thank everyone for being part of this discussion following the screening of The Gatekeepers. Connect the film to J Street's mission:

- This is a very important film for everyone who cares about Israel's future.
- It raises many questions—more than it can answer—about the impact of persistent conflict and enduring occupation on Israel's security and its long-term well-being.
- The voices featured here are those of six individuals who have been on the front lines of insuring Israel's security for the past 30+ years. And while they do not agree on everything, one message comes through clearly: there is an urgent need for a resolution to the ongoing conflict.
- We at J Street—the political home of pro-Israel, pro-peace Americans—are showcasing this film because the questions raised here are crucial ones for people who care about Israel to consider and discuss.

Tell a very brief story about why you personally care about Israel and resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

A Different Kind of Conversation
Encourage the group to have a different kind of conversation than often happens in contentious discussions of Israeli policy and the conflict. Suggest the following guidelines:

- Focus on listening and seeking to understand where others are coming from
- Ask questions from genuine curiosity and express disagreements with respect

Who's in the Room
[Optional] Have the attendees introduce themselves, either in pairs or in the full group, depending on the size of the group. Ask them to share what brings them to care about Israel and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

PART II: PAIR DISCUSSION (15 min)

Have attendees form pairs or small groups of three or four to talk about their initial reactions to the film. The following questions can guide their conversation:

1. What was most striking or surprising?
2. What was one moment in the film that stands out for you, and why?
3. What was challenging to see or hear? What images, ideas, or feelings are still sitting with you? What are you grappling with?
PART III: LARGE GROUP DISCUSSION (30 min)

Facilitate a debrief of the pair discussions and draw from this list of suggested discussion questions. You certainly do not need to ask every question on the list, but do ask at least one question from the “Relationship to Israel and the Conflict” category and at least one question from the “Leadership” category.

Suggested discussion questions:

Relationship to Israel and the Conflict

1. In the film, Yaacov Peri says, “After you retire, you become a bit of a leftist.” Several of the Shin Bet heads experienced key turning points when they began to see things differently. Have you had a moment like that?

2. Did the testimonies of the six Shin Bet chiefs challenge your perceptions of the IDF? Why or why not? How do you integrate what you saw in this film into your overall relationship with Israel?

3. Much of the content of the film is disturbing, upsetting, and challenging to confront. As Chemi Shalev described the film in Ha'aretz:

   The Gatekeepers is not an easy film to watch…. It holds up a cruel, crystal clear mirror that is painful to gaze at but nonetheless hard to tear yourself away from. For anyone who holds Israel dear to his or her heart, it is like a waterboarding of the soul.

   Thus, it is a must-see movie for all Israelis. It is a recommended film for all concerned Jews. And it should be required viewing for some clueless supporters of Israel….

   Chemi Shalev, “‘The Gatekeepers’ is a harsh portrayal of life outside the ghetto of self-denial,” Ha'aretz, February 4, 2013

   What were the most difficult moments for you? Why, in your opinion, did the filmmaker include them so unflinchingly?

4. Some have criticized the film for airing Israel’s dirty laundry. Abraham Foxman of the Anti-Defamation League called the film “a piece of propaganda,” and J. J. Goldberg reported the following conversation with Foxman:

   “I had a dual reaction,” he said afterward. “On one hand, a sense of pride. What other country’s internal security is headed by people who struggle with the moral dimensions, the balance between saving a life and taking a life? On the other hand, it was put in the context of a political struggle against occupation. It almost became a caricature of itself.” It would have been a better movie, he said, if it avoided politics.

Do you agree with Foxman? Why or why not? Do you believe this film and others that are critical of Israeli actions should be shown outside of Israel?

5. The film’s director Dror Moreh said the following in an interview with the Huffington Post:

I must say I think that this film is one of the best pro-Israeli films… because it really comes from a great worry—not from me as the director—but from those six heads [of the Shin Bet].... And when they come and say [what they are saying in the film], you’d better listen.... I think this is definitely relevant to anybody who thinks he knows everything there is to know about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict to watch the movie and to see what those people [are saying] who understand—definitely better than anybody else, definitely better than the politicians, definitely better than the opinion makers—because they were there on the ground.


Do you agree – is this a pro-Israel film?

Security and Democracy

6. Protecting Israel’s citizens from terror is extremely important. It’s clear from the film that the Shin Bet has saved countless innocent lives. Yet the six men painted a picture of the toll it has taken on Israel to do this without a vision for the endgame. In an interview with the film’s director, Avraham Shalom said, “We paid a horrible price for our military successes.” (Sheerly Avni, “Chatting with Oscar-Nominated Israeli Filmmaker Dror Moreh,” The Forward, January 10, 2013) How do you reconcile the tension between short-term security and long-term security?

7. The film shows the growing incitement that led up to Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin’s assassination. Where do you think the line is between free speech and incitement?

Leadership

8. Ami Ayalon tells a story that as a child, he was certain that in Jerusalem, there was a “wise man, who makes decisions.” Years later, he realized that in Jerusalem “no one was thinking for me.” There is a strong current in the film of bemoaning a lack of political leadership. Do you agree or disagree with these critiques? If you agree, what kind of leadership do you believe is needed?

9. While the film casts a spotlight on the counter-terrorism efforts of Israel alone, it’s important to remember that the US and other countries are engaged in substantial counter-terrorism efforts as well. What lessons should Americans take from the film regarding the US war on terror in Afghanistan and elsewhere, in your opinion?
10. **Watching the film here in the US, what are the implications for US foreign policy toward Israel and the Middle East? What lessons should Americans take from the film with regards to leadership on Israeli-Palestinian peace?**

11. **[Recommended closing question] As someone who cares about the future of the Jewish, democratic homeland, as well as Palestinian self-determination and American national security interests, what are you taking away from the film? After watching the film and having this conversation, what, if anything, are you motivated to do?**

**Part IV: CLOSING (5 min)**

Offer a closing thought:

*Thank you for this thoughtful discussion. This is not an easy film to watch or to talk about, but the questions it raises are crucial ones for all of us to grapple with. I hope the conversation will continue.*

*[Optional] I’d like to leave you with a quote from Israeli author David Grossman:*

I’m not a rational, cold person. On the contrary, so much of the politics is emotional here, and the two peoples involved are very emotional, so you must be attuned to emotions very precisely. But the bottom line must be logical. You must not surrender to the primal urges of revenge. I just do not see a better solution than the two-state solution. I’m more sad, and maybe desperate, but not in a way that paralyses me… I cannot afford the luxury of despair.


Talk about how to get involved in J Street’s work to promote US leadership toward a two-state solution.

**Please note:** If a question comes up that you cannot answer, feel free to say, “let’s look into that after the program,” or “I’m not sure, I’d be happy to get back to you on that.”

**For information about J Street’s policy positions,** visit [www.jstreet.org/policy/policy-positions](http://www.jstreet.org/policy/policy-positions)
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**CONTENTS**

- Director’s note
- Quotes from the Shin Bet chiefs
- Learn more: recommended articles, books, and websites

*The six of us reached our opinions from different personal backgrounds and different political outlooks, but we’ve all reached the same conclusion. Many Israelis and American Jews want to deny it, but this is our professional opinion. We’re at the edge of an abyss, and if Israeli-Palestinian peace doesn’t progress, it’s the end of Zionism.*

– Ami Ayalon

**ABOUT THE FILM**

For additional information, reviews, timeline, screenings, and more, visit [sonyclassics.com/thegatekeepers](http://sonyclassics.com/thegatekeepers) [jstreet.org/the-gatekeepers](http://jstreet.org/the-gatekeepers)

**GET INVOLVED IN J STREET**

J Street is the political home for pro-Israel, pro-peace Americans fighting for the future of Israel as the democratic homeland of the Jewish people. We believe that Israel’s Jewish and democratic character depend on a two-state solution, resulting in a Palestinian state living alongside Israel in peace and security. [www.jstreet.org](http://www.jstreet.org)
DIRECTOR’S NOTE

In *The Gatekeepers*, I go to the heads of the Shin Bet, the people with the power to shape history from behind the scenes. Living in the shadows, they have never spoken about their work in front of a camera before.

The idea to do this movie came to me while I was working on my previous film, *Sharon*. From my discussions with the prime minister’s innermost circle of advisors, I learned how the critique of some of these Gatekeepers influenced Sharon’s decision to disengage from Gaza.

I went to each of the Gatekeepers and asked them to tell me their life stories. I wanted them to share their unique perspective on the Arab-Israeli conflict. I was startled, but also thrilled, when they agreed. This gave me an unprecedented, intimate opportunity to enter the inner sanctum of the people who have steered Israel’s decision-making process for almost half a century.

The Gatekeepers were generous with their time and information. Some were better storytellers than others, but they each had a story to tell in their own distinct voices. They were there at all the most important junctions in the history of the State of Israel since the Six Day War.

Day after day, while interviewing them, I found myself staring in disbelief at these anonymous soldiers. Their stories and testimonies were often overwhelming. I couldn’t help but ask myself how far I would have gone if confronted with the same life-or-death dilemmas that they dealt with on a day-to-day basis. I still do.

No one understands the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians better than these six men. When they speak, leaders listen. Perhaps the time has come for the Gatekeepers to address the people at large, and not just the inner circles of decision-makers.

I hope this film initiates that dialogue.

— Dror Moreh
QUOTES FROM THE SHIN BET CHIEFS

Avraham Shalom (1980-1986)
“As soon as we stopped dealing with the Palestinian state and started dealing with terrorism…terror became more sophisticated. So did we. Suddenly we had a lot of work in Gaza and the West Bank and overseas too…so we forgot about the Palestinian issue.”¹
“We paid a horrible price for our military successes. We are isolated completely from our neighbors, we cannot go anywhere, we are a thorn in the side of the region.”²

“After retiring from this job, you become a bit of a leftist.”³

Carmi Gillon (1994-1996)
“We are making the lives of millions unbearable, into prolonged human suffering, [and] it kills me.”⁴

Ami Ayalon (1996-2000)
[Ayalon] remembers that as a child, he was certain that in Jerusalem, there was a “wise man, who makes decisions.” Years later, he realized that in Jerusalem “no one was thinking for me.”⁵
“We are winning all the battles. And we are losing the war.”⁶
“We prevented more attacks each year. We achieved greater security every year…. We wanted more security… and got terrorism.”⁷
“Victory is simply the creation of a better political reality. That’s victory.”⁸
“The six of us reached our opinions from different personal backgrounds and different political outlooks, but we've all reached the same conclusion. Many Israelis and American Jews want to deny it, but this is our professional opinion. We're at the edge of an abyss, and if Israeli-Palestinian peace doesn't progress, it's the end of Zionism.”⁹

Avi Ditcher (2000-2005)
“You can't make peace using military force.”¹⁰

Yuval Diskin (2005-2011)
“We are making Mahmoud Abbas weaker every day and consider it a success. I think we should make up our minds with whom do we want to negotiate—Hamas or Abbas. If it's with Abbas, then let's talk to him. But what is actually being done is that no one talks to Abbas, mostly we just humiliate him.”¹¹
“For them (the enemy), by the way, I was also a terrorist…. One man’s terrorist is another man’s freedom fighter.”¹²
Sources


5. See #3

6. See #3


8. See #7


10. See #7


LEARN MORE

Articles about *The Gatekeepers*


Recommended Books


*Scars of War, Wounds of Peace: The Israeli-Arab Tragedy*, Shlomo Ben-Ami. 2007. An insider’s perspective and even-handed representation of the Arab-Israeli conflict from the birth of Zionism until today.

*The Unmaking of Israel*, Gershom Gorenberg. 2011. A revelation of how Israel’s policies, particularly the continuation of occupation, are undermining its democracy and existence as a Jewish state.

*Pathways to Peace: America and the Arab-Israeli Conflict*, Daniel Kurtzer, ed. 2012. Former Ambassador to Israel Daniel Kurtzer puts forward the best ideas from fellow experts and dignitaries about how the new US administration can secure a two-state solution.
Recommended Websites

Is Peace Possible?
www.ispeacepossible.com
View interactive presentations on four key issues in a negotiated resolution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict: Borders, Security, Refugees and Jerusalem. Produced by the S. Daniel Abraham Center for Middle East Peace and The Atlantic.

Crisis Guide: The Israeli-Palestinian Conflict

J Street Recommends: The Gatekeepers
http://jstreet.org/the-gatekeepers
View clips, articles, and upcoming events around the film. Browse the rest of the site to learn more about the policy positions and activities of J Street, the political home for pro-Israel, pro-peace Americans.