

## Tsabar

People who are a part of cultures associated with warm climates are often stereotyped as hot-headed, quick to yell and even irrational. Israel, a country in the humid Middle East, is made up of individuals with various religions and backgrounds: from those who escaped persecution in Europe to those who dreamed of the Jewish homeland to those who lived there before it was declared a country, Israel is a mix of emotions and opinions. This environment, full of different ideas and beliefs, creates a public which welcomes (or at least tolerates) outbursts of certain emotions, yet feels that some should remain private. In general, there is an emphasis on displaying one's emotions and not hiding one's true self. Being emotional provides a gateway for strong opinions about politics, wars, and the community—and opinions are very highly valued in Israeli society. The intense political climate plays a role in dictating which emotions are suitable to express in public locations, expecting that Israel portray itself as impenetrable. A staunch dislike of hypocrisy comes with an aversion to fakeness and façades, dictating that one should exhibit one's emotions. Emotional displays commonplace on street corners and in restaurants surprise many Anglo Americans who focus on maintaining peace and happiness in public locations. Israelis distinguish between which emotions are acceptable to display publically and which are not; they are quick to become aggravated or demonstrate their affections, yet less likely to show grief.

The Canadian Foreign Affairs website describes the Israeli temperament: "Anger is a frequently expressed emotion that is reached quickly. People go from zero to sixty, fast!" and justifies this by adding that "the whole society is under a lot of stress and pressure." It is often hard for Israelis to hide their feelings, especially when they are angry (as they often are). They are angry at traffic jams, at rotten fruit, and at taxi drivers who block the street; unlike Anglo-Americans, they do not keep anger to themselves. You will often see an Israeli stop on the street or get out of a car to yell at a driver. Instead of simply letting the anger dissipate by

holding it in, an Israeli (males and females alike) will curse, shout and use large hand motions, and sometimes even throw an item in anger (though the last action often happens more in the confines of one's own home). The public is not afraid nor unfamiliar with these outbursts.

Israelis are often described as a "tsabar" (a type of cactus) found in Israel. Both Sarit Nuriel, in the interview I conducted with her, and Kohner, in her article about political emotions in Israel, explain that this is because the typical Israeli is spiky and rough on the outside. The shell is hard to penetrate and not always welcoming, as demonstrated by outbursts of anger rather than attempts to put on a pleasant façade (Nuriel, Jan 14; Khoner, "Refusing Militarism", 2004). However, the inside is sweet and genuine. Israelis are not only comfortable with showing their anger, but also comfortable with sharing their happiness with others; laughter and smiles are often seen when two Israelis get to know each other. Laughter symbolizes happiness and joy, two emotions often needed during times of turmoil in the conflict-ridden country. Nevertheless, not all emotions are generally publically displayed. Sarit states that "Israelis show their emotions a lot and don't hide them. We say it to your face [...] We are not afraid to show our anger or when we disagree or look down upon something. We show more anger, not grief or crying" (Nuriel, Jan 14).

The Israeli mindset of hiding one's grief stems from the fear of appearing weak to others. Crying in public is seen as odd and makes those around uncomfortable. Though crying due to sadness and yelling out of anger both imply a loss of control over oneself in Anglo-American culture (Wierzbicka, *Emotions across Languages*), sadness and grief leave one far more vulnerable than anger, in the eyes of Israelis, which makes hiding sadness a more acceptable façade in our culture. Anger implies power and instills the idea in others that one will not be afraid to act if provoked. Sadness, on the other hand, indicates that one cannot cope with the current situations in one's life. Inside the home, weeping is accepted and the griever is comforted, but in public it is unfamiliar and discouraged. This is particularly true in the army. Every Israeli citizen must serve in the army and the population feels it is critical to portray the defense force as unbreakable. The difficult conditions of everyday life in the army require thick skin, which is not portrayed through crying, the Israelis believe. Liora Sion, a researcher on social behaviors of men in the army, posits that "intensified by social contexts of the Israeli

army: men must display control and mastery within public arenas of small, relatively cohesive, groups and (often) close relations with commanders” (2009; pg 31). Sion’s research explains the transformation that occurs when men are fulfilling their duty in the defense force; whereas at home they might be more sensitive, outside they suppress their sadness or fear. Dr. Lebel, a lecturer on Political Psychology, makes observations which support that view. He states that “bereaved parents [of deceased soldiers] were officially asked to avoid public displays of emotion and to understand that even while processing their grief, they have a role to play. They were reminded [...] that the new Jew [—which represents an Israeli in the past few decades—] belongs to a generation ‘that knows neither tears nor prayers’” (2008). The Israeli public is focused on displaying a strong front to the world, controlling certain emotions in public settings, even if still grieving.

As for grieving in private, the Jewish religion dictates seven days of bereavement after the passing away of an individual. During that time, those who knew the deceased come to pay their respects to the family, helping by providing food and other services. Inside the family’s home, displays of grief—weeping, covering one’s face with one’s hands—are welcome. The grievers comfort one another through understanding looks and small gestures of affection (such as a pat on the shoulder). Showing one’s sorrow over the loss of a loved one is expected in smaller gatherings.

The origins of the practice of confining many emotions to the home can be seen in extremely religious Jewish culture. Many Orthodox Jews do not show many emotions, including affection, outside of the home; however, most people in Israel are not as religious and more commonly show love publically. In the everyday interactions, Israelis constantly display affection. Upon greeting friends, Israelis embrace one another. They often kiss family members or close friends once or twice on the cheek to show fondness as well. Couples often hold hands or put their arms around one another while walking down the street. It is not common to say ‘I love you’ as often as in English, though it is not out of the blue or shocking when it is used. The words are regarded as more serious than in English, used between people who truly love each other such as lovers or family members. These affectionate phrases and interactions are quite common in and out of the house. Children would often see parents holding hands or giving

each other a quick kiss; parents and children often kiss on the cheek as well, in public and private, to demonstrate how much they care about one another. Spontaneous hugs, kisses as greetings or goodbyes, are common and reveal the sweet inside of the 'tsabar' that is the Israeli. Once the spiky shell is removed, and one has passed the anger and curses, the genuine loving Israeli is discovered.

Affection and anger, two emotions associated with heat, are publically displayed nearly without shame. The humidity and high temperatures get under the skin and force emotions to emerge. Sorrow and grief are more personal and communicate weakness thus they are often kept to smaller gatherings. But as a member of the culture, I can safely state I more often see the sweet, affectionate tsabar than the unpleasant, spiky one.

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