

The Peoplehood Papers provide a platform for Jews to discuss their common agenda and key issues related to their collective identity. The journal appears three times a year, with each issue addressing a specific theme. The editors invite you to share your thoughts on the ideas and discussions in the Papers, as well as all matters pertinent to Jewish Peoplehood: publications@jpeoplehood.org

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The UJA-Federation of New York cares for those in need, rescues those in harm's way and renews and strengthens the Jewish people in New York in Israel and around the world. **The Commission on the Jewish People** is dedicated to building connections among the diverse elements of the Jewish People and develops and supports efforts to forge linkages among Jews wherever they may live and support Israel as a vibrant, democratic and pluralistic Jewish state.

The Center for Jewish Peoplehood Education (CJPE) is a "one stop" resource center for institutions and individuals seeking to build collective Jewish life, with a focus on Jewish Peoplehood and Israel education. It provides professional and leadership training, content and programmatic development or general Peoplehood conceptual and educational consulting. www.jpeoplehood.org



המרכז לחינוך לעמיות יהודית
The Center for Jewish Peoplehood Education

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of New York

Jewish Peoplehood in Practice
Shifting From the "What" to the "How"

The Peoplehood Papers 11

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Jewish Peoplehood in Practice

Shifting From the “What” to the “How”

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Jewish Peoplehood in Practice Shifting From the “What” to the “How”

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From the Editor

Shlomi Ravid

Jewish Peoplehood in Practice – Shifting From the “What” to the “How”

The challenges of Jewish Peoplehood have emerged on the Jewish scene over the last decade or two. Most of the efforts in the initial period went into trying to understand the meaning and significance of Jewish Peoplehood in this day and age. Some of the lead questions were: **what** does peoplehood mean today? **Why** is it important? How do we **define** it? However with the growing awareness to the weakening of the Jewish collective and its impact on the Jewish communal and global life, a shift in focus has begun. More and more Jewish organizations and leadership are asking themselves: **How** do we nurture a sense of Peoplehood in the minds and hearts of today’s Jews? What are we **to do** in order to insure the future of the Jewish people? **How** do we make our collective commitment to improve the world relevant and inspiring? **How do we inculcate** Jewish collective identity as an essential part of a person’s individual Jewish identity?

We are dedicating this issue of the Peoplehood papers to the shift from the “What” to the “How”. Our hope is to open the conversation on how we change the current Jewish landscape to one that is conducive to nurturing a sense of the collective. What is our theory of change? What are impactful areas of interventions? How should this challenge impact our thinking on Jewish education, leadership development and our communal structure? Who are effective change agents? What tools are needed? What age groups should we focus on? Our aim is to shift the Peoplehood conversation towards the practical questions of identity, community and people building.

Noam Pianko proposes a rather revolutionary paradigm shift. “My vision for peoplehood reflects another –hood paradigm—not nationhood, but “neighborhood.”...” Peoplehood based on a neighborhood, rather than nationhood model promotes understanding Jewish collectivity as the sum of divergent processes of Jewish exploration and community building.” According to Pianko “Neighborhoods” broadly construed, either in-person or via focused global networks, create a platform for engagement, meaning, creation, and innovation, with Jewish communities looking to develop what the software community calls open-source standards.” The outcome will therefore be: “... local, informal expressions of collectivity, rather than overarching institutional centers. Micro-

communities emerge as the creators and perpetuators of the ongoing project of Jewish peoplehood. Divergent and grassroots expressions of Jewish involvement are not signs of the end of Jewish peoplehood, but the basis for its future”.

Speaking from a global perspective **Einat Wilf** proposes “five potential avenues of action to nurture the sense of belonging to a Jewish people globally: Global minyans, a global Jewish family genetic tree, Israel, Hebrew and recognition”. Together they frame what she calls the “Mitzvot of Peoplehood” which “much like the known Mitzvot, then become “the ‘what’ and the ‘how’, the substance and the mechanism, by which one is a member of the Jewish people”.

Lynn Schusterman shares the Schusterman Foundation approach towards the development of “a virtuous cycle of vibrant Jewish life”. It is expressed through the vision she lays out for their endeavor: “... if we are successful, we will see a time when the vast majority of young people readily participate in Jewish life, draw on Jewish values to inform their worldviews and take on leadership roles in their communities. We will see their journeys supported by a global Jewish infrastructure that embraces, incubates and scales effective efforts to meet the needs and interests of all Jewish people. And we will see Jewish communities around the world, strengthened by a surge of engaged young people, an appetite for innovation and a strong communal infrastructure, connected to each other and contributing to the greater whole”.

Netaly Ophir Flint points to an untapped resource of global Peoplehood change agents – individual Jews who relocated to other countries on the globe: “we should be better utilizing the best resource we have out there for fostering global Jewish peoplehood – those members who naturally embody the global-ness of the Jewish people”. Using the examples of Israelis who reside abroad and Olim who moved to Israel Ophir-Flint proposes: “our goal should be to cultivate and nurture those individuals who can serve as ‘living bridges’, and to do so wherever they are in their local communities”.

Rabbi **Sid Schwarz** reports about the Rene Cassin Fellowship Program (RCFP), a yearlong program on Judaism and human rights for young adults, ages 25-35, with hubs in New York, London and Jerusalem. He claims that “the lesson for those who care about strengthening the Jewish people is that we need to meet today’s young adults where they are at and help them articulate what is at the root of our collective Jewish enterprise. This is the only way to engage Next Gen Jews”.

Clare Goldwater and **Shlomi Ravid** focus the conversation on education broadly defined. They introduce the new Toolkit for Peoplehood Education: “it is an acknowledgement that we are dealing with an identity crisis that requires a holistic educational approach,

facilitated by educators as the key change agents for assuring a strong and rich Jewish collective future. It reflects a conviction that our response should be practical, proactive and impactful. We believe that it signifies a broader shift from an intellectual conversation about what is Peoplehood to a practical approach to rebuilding Jewish collective identity; A shift in focus from concept-building to people-building”.

Dan Brown proposes to bring Limmud to the USA: “A strong, national Limmud is the perfect vehicle to connect, and engage, American Jewish young adults in Jewish Peoplehood”. Brown points to the potential impact: “as a community we gain the ability to engage the minds as well as the hands of today’s young adults. Through this engagement we will nurture both commitment and Peoplehood. We help instill a sense of Identity and connectedness that will propel the community to even greater heights in the years ahead”. The Limmud process as well as content makes it according to Brown the “place to practice the ‘How’ of Jewish Peoplehood in the 21st Century”.

Rene H Levy and **David Chivo** from Seattle share the amazing story of a call to a conversation to discuss the Peoplehood crisis that yielded nearly 800 participants. Not less inspiring is the strategic roadmap proposed at the meeting: “A three component strategic roadmap was proposed including: (i) adult education aimed at self-transformation (starting with leaders of any Jewish institution); (ii) incorporation of peoplehood in school curricula; (iii) focus on the peoplehood dimension by communal institutions both internally (transformative learning for staff and lay leadership) and externally, in their programming and ‘convener’ roles”.

Yahal Porat who directs the Israel New York Connections program brings a practitioner’s perspective to the table. It is interesting to note that he sees most of the challenges in what happens to the participants after their return home. For him “the work is just starting once the Mifgash ends. On the basis of this fundamental and unique experience the real Peoplehood path begins”. Porat sees the challenge of developing the Peoplehood “Mitzvot” as the piece still missing from our puzzle. But interestingly enough, just like Pianko who we opened with, he sees the community as the arena where the next phase of peoplehood will be built.

As we are beginning to grapple with the findings of the recently published PEW study, practical approaches such as the ones presented in this publication, point to the way of the future. It is important to note that despite the study’s concerning findings regarding the state of the American Jewish community, it does open with the following sentence: “American Jews overwhelmingly say they are proud to be Jewish and have a strong sense

of belonging to the Jewish people”. The Jewish community ought to seize that sense of belonging, enhance and deepen it. It needs to focus its efforts on developing strategies, tools and means to achieve those goals. And it needs to do it now in order to impact the finding of the future studies.



The Time Has Come to Build Limmud USA

Dan Brown

A strong, national Limmud is the perfect vehicle to connect and engage, American Jewish young adults in Jewish Peoplehood

The American Jewish community is facing a paradigm shift from the how and why Jews connected to community institutions in the past to how Jews of today - especially young adults - are relating, and connecting, to the Jewish "establishment" of the 21st Century. These changes, often referred to as generational, are so much more than simply looking at the different characteristics of, say, the Greatest Generation to Baby Boomers to Generation X or Y. For while today's young adults are fully immersed in the pace and technology of our times, they are also invested in timeless values. "They want to give and to serve. They want involvements that engage their minds as well as their hands."¹

And what better way to engage their minds Jewishly than through Limmud, the second largest informal Jewish education initiative globally.

Established in 1980 as a small conference by, and for, Jewish educators, Limmud has become, in the words of Sir Jonathan Sacks, "British Jewry's greatest export."

But what is Limmud? From the Hebrew, to learn, Limmud is a platform for engagement in informal Jewish education, tailored to fit the needs of each individual community. It could be anything from a one-day event in Boston, to an extended Shabbaton program in Atlanta, to small-group text-learning programs taking place over Skype. All coming together to learn - about our history and culture - and to engage with one another.

Limmud provides a thirst for knowledge that is difficult to quench. A desire to know and to become acquainted is always in the air. Most impressively, despite the varied backgrounds, everyone listens - and learns - from one another.

¹ 2012 Millennial Impact Report, Achieve and Johnson Grossnickle Associates

The lifeblood of Limmud is the grass roots efforts of volunteers creating their own, unique, events. Everything Limmud does is designed and executed by talented and committed individuals in their own local communities - from the smallest of tasks to long-term strategy. These volunteers are empowered to not only direct, but to own the events they create.

But Limmud is something in addition - most evidenced, so far, in Europe and the countries of the former Soviet Union. For in both regions, Limmud has become much more than an event or two - Limmud has become a networked community. Literally thousands of people have bought-in to the concept, the approach, and the core values of what Limmud can, and does, bring to the table. As a result, Limmud has become a training ground for the next generation of Jewish communal leadership. A place to engage all corners of the Jewish world in new, exciting and collaborative efforts.

In the U.S., unfortunately, no such training ground exists. More importantly, on the national level, not one single initiative exists for Jewish engagement that encompasses all segments of our community. Further, not one of the long established alphabet soup organizations have demonstrated they have the understanding, or the resources, to move forward in this critical regard.

Enter Limmud USA

Consider: While many organizations pay lip-service to younger generations, occasionally listening but rarely delegating meaningful responsibility, Limmud allows the

individual to 'run with the ball,' regardless of their age.

Consider: Limmud brings people together to directly engage and to connect - with each other and with the broader community.

Consider: Instead of endless conversation on what we all know needs to be done, Limmud is actually out there, doing.

Consider: Instead of top-down, Limmud is very much bottom-up.

Consider: Limmud is a place to practice the "How" of Jewish Peoplehood in the 21st Century.

Will the task be challenging? Without a doubt. Limmud already has a strong foundation in multiple American Jewish communities. This foundation needs to be built upon - both locally and nationally. Local Limmud programs need to be strengthened so they can become feeders to a national initiative. In the U.K., Limmud has demonstrated that

strong local programs can exist in tandem with the major annual Conference held every December.

Philanthropically, this will also be a significant undertaking that needs to bring together as one the organizational strengths and financial capabilities of multiple resources. No easy task. Importantly, the funders need to be ones that are willing to trust young people to do for themselves. Part of what makes Limmud what it is is that control is not in the hands of funders. The funding community needs to be bold, recognize the upside and be willing to "turn over the keys."

Can this happen? Yes.

Just look at the potential impact: as a community we gain the ability to engage the minds as well as the hands of today's young adults. Through this engagement we will nurture both commitment and Peoplehood. We help instill a sense of Identity and connectedness that will propel the community to even greater heights in the years ahead.

As we have learned from the recently released "Connected to Give" report, "the more connected American Jews are to Jewish social networks and Jewish communities, the more likely they are to give, not only to Jewish organizations but to non-Jewish organizations as well."²

If this happens we score a major win - for the individual and the community.

Priceless.

Dan Brown is the founder of eJewishPhilanthropy.com.



Jewish Peoplehood: From Concept-Building to People-Building

The Case of the Peoplehood Education Toolkit

Clare Goldwater and Shlomi Ravid

Historians of Jewish communal history may well describe the last two decades as the period of the rude awakening to the crisis of Jewish Peoplehood. The long-term impacts of the forces of modernity and sociology on one hand, and lack of response on the other, have combined to shake the foundations of Jewish collective identity. Jews of different backgrounds and commitments have less and less to do with each other, the sense of a joint fate and common destiny is fading away rapidly and the feeling of a joint responsibility for fellow Jews and for the Jewish enterprise is weakening significantly. The result is that Jewish collective identity is under an existential threat.

The initial attempts at responding to the challenge over the last two decades, beyond the attempts to understand it and its sources, can be grouped into three approaches:

1. **The Conceptual approach** starts with the concept of Peoplehood itself, and focuses on trying to define it and explain what it can mean in today's world. The assumption or aspiration was that if we succeed in explaining this complex concept in simple and clear words, Jews would actually be convinced to embrace Jewish Peoplehood. Or, in other words, if we clarified the vagueness of the concept and also reframed it as the ancient Jewish value that it is, that should bring Peoplehood back.
2. **The Interactive approach** focuses on action, and assumes that if Jews of different origins meet and interact, the Mifgash (encounter) will re-light the Peoplehood spark. Similarly, the impact of the Israel Experience is to spark a sense of engagement with both a common Jewish fate and a global Jewish partnership. The assumption is that these experiences create a sense of peoplehood by design.
3. **The Joint Projects approach** aspires to replicate the impact of grand collective projects such as the creation of the State of Israel, the Six Day War or the Save Soviet Jewry campaign which galvanized the People, across religious, national and all other boundaries, in a common cause. The challenge with this approach is that

² <http://ejewishphilanthropy.com/u-s-jewish-giving-who-is-giving-what-to-whom/>

authentic projects that will resonate with a broad majority of Jews are difficult if not impossible to generate.

All these approaches, while valuable and effective in their own terms, are at best partial responses to a much more complex challenge. The crisis of Peoplehood is an identity crisis. As such it can never be addressed with a single-pronged approach. Engagement and commitment are never strictly intellectual outcomes. Nor can an interactive approach suffice when shaping consciousness is the goal. A cognitive and reflective process needs to follow if identity is to be impacted. As to the joint projects, beyond our ability to generate them artificially, and even if we had significant numbers of Jews embrace them (such as, for example, projects of Tikun Olam) they do not necessarily nurture the sense of the collective.

It is in this context then, that the development of the **Peoplehood Education Toolkit** by the Center for Jewish Peoplehood Education and the Commission on the Jewish People of the UJA-Federation of New York represents a strategic shift in the approach to shaping the Jewish collective future.

The Peoplehood Education Toolkit (www.jpeoplehood.org/toolkit)* is a concrete and practical online resource for Jewish educators and leaders who seek to engage their constituents with Jewish Peoplehood. The Toolkit offers both conceptual as well as highly practical, ready-to-use resources that can be used in all educational settings (camps, JCCs, Hillels, schools, synagogues and more). It provides answers to the questions of 'Why incorporate Peoplehood into Jewish education?' as well as 'How do I build engaging and meaningful Peoplehood activities?' and 'What should I do next?' As such, the Peoplehood Toolkit is the first attempt to offer educators a comprehensive set of tools and resources for teaching Peoplehood.

By focusing on both the conceptual AND the practical, the Toolkit reflects a different approach to the challenge of nurturing and strengthening Jewish Peoplehood than those that have gone before. It assumes that the way to a significant and vibrant collective passes through the conceptual discussion about "What is Jewish Peoplehood?" into the questions of "What does it mean for me to be part of a Jewish collective?" and "How can I contribute to that collective, and the world?" This approach shifts the focus to the educational practice required for engaging individual Jews with the Jewish collective in practice. It frames the endeavor and the challenges of building collective Jewish identity through a learner centered approach.

As a result we believe that, in policy terms, the significance of the Toolkit is much more than the creation of another set of educational tools. Rather, it is an acknowledgement

that we are dealing with an identity crisis that requires a holistic educational approach, facilitated by educators as the key change agents for assuring a strong and rich Jewish collective future. It reflects a conviction that our response should be practical, proactive and impactful. We believe that it signifies a broader shift from an intellectual conversation about what is Peoplehood to a practical approach to rebuilding Jewish collective identity; A shift in focus from concept-building to people-building. Or, as Karl Marx framed it: "philosophers have only interpreted the world in various ways, the point is to change it".

Clare Goldwater is a Jewish educational consultant and leadership coach. Clare is a graduate of Oxford University and the Hebrew University and was a Jerusalem Fellow at the Mandel Leadership Institute in Jerusalem.

Dr. Shlomi Ravid is the director of the Center for Jewish Peoplehood Education and editor of the Peoplehood Papers.

*The Toolkit was conceptualized and created by Shlomi Ravid and Clare Goldwater



Jewish Peoplehood Crisis: The Seattle “Call For Conversation”*

Rene H Levy and David Chivo

There is a general agreement among leaders of communal organizations that we are witnessing a dangerous erosion in peoplehood consciousness, particularly among the younger generation. In 2008, the Commission on the Jewish People of the NY Federation made the assessment that *“the vision of Jewish peoplehood is at risk of disappearing”*¹. Similarly, Dr. Shlomi Ravid (director of the Center for Jewish Peoplehood Education) stated that there is *“a sense of urgency in addressing the Jewish Peoplehood crisis of our time”*².

There is also an assessment that we lack an approach to address this crisis. John S. Ruskay from the UJA-Federation of New York expressed it as follows: *“The question of how to build and foster a sense of collective identity poses therefore one of our more salient contemporary challenges—one that the Jewish federation system has begun to confront.”*³ That perspective was shared by Dr S. Ravid: *“the Jewish world seems to be caught unprepared to address the challenge of keeping the sense of Peoplehood alive though the consequences may dramatically impact its future.”*⁴

1 Shlomi Ravid and Varda Rafaeli, Jewish Peoplehood Education: Framing the Field (2011), 14. <http://www.jpeoplehood.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/02/TaskForceReport.pdf>

2 Shlomi Ravid Peoplehood – the Next Challenge: Thoughts on the eve of the New Year - The Center for Jewish Peoplehood Education www.jpeoplehood.org/.../The%20Next%20Peoplehood%20Challenge%2.

3 John S Ruskay, Preface in Jewish Peoplehood Change and Challenge, ed Menachem Revivi and Ezra Kopelowitz (Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2009), ix.

4 Shlomi Ravid Peoplehood – the Next Challenge: Thoughts on the eve of the New Year - The Center for Jewish Peoplehood Education www.jpeoplehood.org/.../The%20Next%20Peoplehood%20Challenge%2.

*This article was originally published in eJewishPhilanthropy

In this context, we wish to share an approach that was recently initiated in Seattle to address this problem at the community level.

Interestingly, it began as a grassroots effort by a small team (less than 10) of highly dedicated volunteers who publicized an announcement using social and traditional media to initiate a community-wide conversation on building Jewish unity entitled “The Jewish Peoplehood Crisis: A Call for Conversation” (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P7VNoZVe6CA>)

They proposed that the “community conversation” would be based on the seminal work entitled “Baseless Hatred: what it is and what you can do about it” authored by Professor Rene H Levy (a Seattle resident). Topics that were listed included: (i) the roots of the concept of mutual responsibility; (ii) how to teach the younger generation peoplehood allegiance based on an understanding of the purpose of the Jewish people; (iii) how to develop empathy, to self-transform and to impact relationships with family, friends and co-workers. Participation in this Town Hall event required advance email reservation.

The organizing team reserved a hall for approximately 200 participants for an event slated on the evening of Sunday, July 14th, but within a few weeks, the number of reservations far exceeded these expectations. The team then reached out to the Jewish Federation of Greater Seattle for assistance in further publicizing the event. The cooperation resulted in a first-of-its kind event in the history of the Seattle Jewish community with an attendance approaching 800 participants. Some aspects of Dr Levy’s new concept of peoplehood, follow up questions and answers, and reactions to the event can be found in the press coverage: http://www.jtnews.net/index.php?/news/item/stop_the_hate/C22/, July 16, 2013) and on YouTube: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ae39zFtvUt8>, part 1 of 5).

Nevertheless, it is useful to share here a summary of the principal features of that concept. Firstly, the Jewish peoplehood crisis was defined as (i) loss in *“identification with Jews throughout the world”*; loss in *“commitment to Jews throughout the world”*, and (iii) loss in *“responsibility for Jews throughout the world”*.

To address the needs of the younger generation, it was proposed that the peoplehood concept should include the following characteristics (i) an explicit moral dimension; (ii) a statement of the mission/purpose of the Jewish people (iii) it should be independent

from religious affiliation; (iv) it should depart from published characterizations of Jewish peoplehood as a relatively recent concept⁵, only a few decades old⁶ with no agreed upon definition⁷ (because of various aspects such as ethnicity, nationhood [Israel/Diaspora], religion, identity, history and fate).

The peoplehood concept began with an analysis of the historical "on-off" relationship between Jews and their land, starting with the birth of the Jewish people in a foreign land. It was shown that *"for Jews, peoplehood is unique because it has always been primarily about the ethical character of their interpersonal relationships, not just the passive sharing of real estate."* It was therefore proposed that *"the mission of the Jewish people has been, and remains, to create a moral society based on the principle of mutual responsibility."* It was also shown that the notion of *"mutual responsibility"* is deeply rooted in Jewish history as a central Jewish principle of interpersonal relationships, aimed at addressing the unanswered question of Cain, *"Am I my brother's keeper?"* The *"Jewish"* answer to Cain's question was provided by Judah when he stated, *"I am a guarantor for my brother"* and thus re-united his family. The biblical notion of mutual responsibility (in Hebrew *"arevut"*) was later formalized in Jewish law and tradition as *"Every Jew is responsible for every other Jew"*, meaning that *"we are all our sisters' and brothers' keepers!"* A key feature of Levy's peoplehood concept is that mutual responsibility is not achievable unless the endemic problem of *"baseless hatred"* is addressed because it is established that hatred destroys the basic human capacity of empathy. Without empathy, *"others"* lose their humanity, and mutual responsibility is not possible.

In terms of relationships among Jews and Jewish groups, it was pointed out that *"we choose the significance we attribute to our differences"*. Therefore, when we feel threatened by the beliefs of other Jews, we should ask ourselves: *"do we care too much or not enough for each other?"*

A three component strategic roadmap was proposed including: (i) adult education aimed at self-transformation (starting with leaders of any Jewish institution); (ii) incorporation of peoplehood in school curricula; (iii) focus on the peoplehood dimension by communal

institutions both internally (transformative learning for staff and lay leadership) and externally, in their programming and *"convener"* roles.

The question resonating today in Seattle's Jewish community pertains to *"what's next,"* in other words, how do the individuals and the institutions most concerned with advancing the notion of Jewish peoplehood move forward? In the Seattle case, the Jewish Federation played a positive role in promoting the community conversation led by Dr. Levy, but in general, federation-type organizations can be most beneficial to the process of moving forward via their ability to lead and convene stakeholders and eventually fund complex communal endeavors, in order to proceed beyond a single institution.

For a Jewish community to develop effective strategies that address divisive issues within the framework (and spirit) of Arevut, at the table must be broad representation including worship institutions, community centers, schools, Hillel centers, advocacy organizations and other kinds of educational entities. Their individual buy-in of the concept of Arevut is critical to the implementation of the set of educational, experiential and collaborative cross-institution endeavors that will bring to life a communal commitment to advancing a sensitivity and awareness of the importance of Jewish peoplehood. The leadership that brought this conversation to life in Seattle has begun to define its strategic direction, with the objective of a Federation initiated city-wide endeavor to achieve the meta-goals related to peoplehood consciousness. What is clear though, is that the community discussion about Jewish peoplehood in Seattle struck a chord with Jews from all walks of life and that many of its leaders are committed to its furtherance. While the exact nature of what will happen next is being finalized, the Seattle experiment showed that once the genie is out of the bottle, the wishes of the community are for the conversations about peoplehood and mutual responsibility to continue. Such a response bodes well for the future

Rene H Levy, PhD, is Professor Emeritus of the University of Washington

David Chivo is the Executive Vice President of the Jewish Federation of Greater Seattle.

5 Menachem Revivi, Ezra Kopelowitz Editor's Note in Jewish Peoplehood Change and Challenge, ed Menachem Revivi and Ezra Kopelowitz (Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2009),xiii.

6 Jonathan Sacks., Future Tense (New York, Schocken Books,2009),25.

7 Erica Brown and Misha Galperin "The case for Jewish Peoplehood Can we be One?"(Woodstock, Vermont, Jewish Lights Publishing, 2009) p.1



Our Untapped Potential: Nurturing and Leveraging “Living Bridges” – Wherever They Are

Netaly Ophir Flint

From time to time I get invited to participate in panel discussions or conferences about Jewish peoplehood and the future of the Jewish people. One of my most interesting observations from these encounters is the generational difference in answers to the often posed question: “when was the first time you felt a sense of belonging to the Jewish collective, a sense of Jewish peoplehood?”

I can roughly divide the answers given between those who are below the age of 40 and those who are above the age of 40, though obviously exceptions exist. Those among the younger participants, who actually did feel that sense of greater belonging (many did not), usually answer the question with a detailed story. They trace back their Jewish journey, recalling transformative moments that caused them to feel part of something bigger – to feel a sense of the Jewish collective. I belong to that that group. But interestingly, the older participants give a much simpler answer. They say, “I don’t remember the first time, because I have always felt part of the Jewish people, it was just always there.”

Why is this so significant? Because it shows the difference in our Jewish evolution over time. What was a trivial sense of collectiveness, or *arvut hadadit*, that existed for my grandparent’s and even my parent’s generation is not trivial for my generation and even less so for my children’s generation. Historical and sociological changes in modern times have eroded for many, the foundation of being part of one people. Thus, feeling part of the Jewish collective – that we are connected and bound to each other regardless of the physical place where we may choose to live - is something that today we must intentionally work to achieve.

To do so, we must first understand that a central piece of Peoplehood is a *feeling* – a level of consciousness that includes an emotional as well as an intellectual connection to the history, the culture, the heritage, and the values of the Jewish people. In order to foster that sense of belonging, each individual, as well as all of us as a collective, need to go through a process that connects us first to our own Jewish community and then to

other Jewish communities around the globe. There is no one recipe for how to achieve this goal, but what is clear, is that there is no more powerful of a tool than the *mifgash* in order to do this.

The *mifgash* – literally translated as “encounter” - is usually defined as an authentic, personal, face-to-face meeting between Jews from different cultures or communities. The *mifgash* allows us to experience shared values and interests, as well as differing customs, beliefs and behaviors between different Jewish communities.

Over the years, we have spent tremendous resources moving people between communities in order to create these *mifgashim* - American Jews filling up Birthright busses in Israel or young Israeli *shinshinim* being exported to Jewish summer camps and college campuses, to name a few examples. But in our excessive search to create the cross-border *mifgash*, we have, for a large part, missed one of the biggest resources that we have right under our noses: those individuals who, by virtue of their life circumstances, can serve as “living bridges”, and can create authentic *mifgashim*, right in their local communities.

This is one of the biggest untapped potentials in the Jewish world and our goal should be to cultivate and nurture those individuals who can serve as “living bridges”, and to do so wherever they are in their local communities. In other words, we should be better utilizing the best resource we have out there for fostering global Jewish peoplehood – those members who naturally embody the global-ness of the Jewish people.

There are certain populations that naturally fit this category more than others – however, for decades, for a number of cultural and historical reasons, they have often been ignored. One of these populations is the Israeli Diaspora – those Israelis who have chosen to emigrate and to live their lives outside of Israel. Another are Olim in Israel.

What is so special about these populations? First, they embody the cultural nuances of living in multiple Jewish communities simultaneously. These are individuals who usually hold a tri-identity. In other words, their identity is made up of Israeli, Jewish, and Local (for example, American or British or Australian) cultural components all at the same time. That gives them an ability to instinctually understand some of the cultural differences that are so hard for others to grasp. Thus, these individuals – and especially their children - are distinctly positioned to serve as living bridges, as they possess a unique set of qualities that no native Israeli or Diaspora Jew has by themselves. These individuals stand out as a distinct type of Jew within our global tapestry, with a unique ability to foster Jewish Peoplehood, strengthen the connection between Israel and the Diaspora, and to bring value to local Jewish communities in countless ways.

For example, they can enrich Jewish life in local communities outside of Israel by helping bridge cultural gaps with Israeli society, by providing a live example of modern Hebrew language usage, by bringing unique Israeli social dynamics to the wider Jewish community, by contributing the Israeli creative energy and spirit of innovation, and by providing a deeper connection to Israel through national holidays like Yom Ha'zikanon and Yom Ha'atzmaut.

They can also serve as bridges for Jews living in Israel by showcasing a wide array of diverse methods for practicing Judaism, by demonstrating the value of a rich community life, by embodying pluralism, and by communicating the nuances of living a Jewish life outside of Israel.

As such, these individuals can be some of the most powerful local role models, peer counselors, and educators we have out there today. The problem is that they are not on our communal radar, and there is little effort being made to support, nurture, and enhance these individuals and to create these localized *mifgashim*, right in our back yards.

This is not to say that cross-border physical *mifgashim* are not important. Naturally, there is no substitute for a young Australian Jew spending a six-week internship in Israel or for an Israeli to spend a semester studying at an American university and going to Shabbat dinner at a local Hillel. But those encounters are difficult and expensive and don't happen often enough. Imagine that in addition to the above, we created Shabbat dinner *mifgashim* with local Israeli-American families in their own communities. Imagine that instead of merely sending Israel Fellows to campuses we had a local Israeli-American or Israeli-British student who can speak both 'languages' doing some of the engagement. Or imagine that part of the Tzofim youth movement's curriculum in Israel is intentionally administered by an *Ole* who recently moved to Israel.

The opportunities are endless, and coupled with the traditional trans-border *mifgashim*, they can be a game changer in the process of cultivating a feeling of global Jewish peoplehood among the younger generation. This is one of our biggest untapped resources, and our goal should be to look for, embrace, and nurture our Jewish living bridges, wherever they are.

Netaly Ophir Flint is the incoming CEO of the Reut Institute



The Future of Peoplehood: From Nationhood to Neighborhood

Noam Pianko

Does a secular Jew in Berkeley have a shared future and common values with a Haredi Jew in Bnei Brak? As long as concepts of peoplehood make the case for the unity of such diverse Jewish populations, the future of this key word has little potential to inspire Jewish collectivity.

In order to justify this axiomatic assumption, descriptions of peoplehood must find the lowest common denominator unifying criteria. Thus the rationale for Jewish peoplehood rests on abstract and water-down claims about shared "values," "history," and "mission." As the internal forces of fragmentation overtake the external forces unifying the collective, the efficacy of a peoplehood discourse grounded in abstract commonalities that conflict with personal convictions and communal values will dissipate.

Fortunately, peoplehood's history as a key word in Jewish life illuminates the ways in which today's primary associations of peoplehood with unity, solidarity, and shared values represents a new innovation shaped by modern nationalism. A better understanding of the term's relatively recent evolution provides a crucial opportunity to reconsider its future.

The intertwined nature of peoplehood, theories of nationalism, and Zionism is evident in the very construction of what was less than 100 years ago a new term. The suffix "-hood" in both peoplehood and nationhood is not coincidental. In the 1930's, the use of nationhood as the defining basis for Jewish collectivity became more problematic in the American Jewish context because of its statist associations with the future Jewish state and its accompanying perception that Jews might have dual loyalties. Early adopters of "peoplehood" (a term with almost no precedent in the English language) came to the term as Zionist influenced thinkers seeking a replacement for "nationhood." Peoplehood provided a blank slate, or even a code word, that could softly preserve Jewish nationalist assumptions about the centrality of the land, language, national history, and culture, without invoking the contentious language (inside and outside of the Jewish community) of Jews as a nation.

Yet, the current discourse about peoplehood and definitions of Jewish collectivity has not fully acknowledged its roots in modern notions of nationhood—and specifically in American Zionists' innovations and conversations in the 1930s and 1940s. The strong, but rarely acknowledged, historical relationship between peoplehood and Jewish nationhood, with the State and Land of Israel at the center of the story of peoplehood, remains the elephant in the room in plotting a course for how peoplehood will be conceptualized and practiced in the future. This is not to suggest that Israel should not be an integral part of the Jewish collectivity conversation. However, peoplehood's long association with nationalism has limited the possibilities for thinking differently about what it means to be part of a people.

One of the central goals for a national movement is to justify collective bonds by emphasizing a unified political body with a shared history, mission, and values. The nationalist paradigm of peoplehood prioritizes the ideal of Jewish unity organized around the centripetal force of attachment to Israel and to a collective essence (usually referred to as a “shared mission”). The elevation of these criteria of cohesion marginalizes a significant proportion of the Jewish people whose attachment to the collective does not resonate with themes shaped by modern nationalism.

The sense of a declining interest in peoplehood is not a problem that can be solved by repackaging ideas calibrated to rally American Jews in response to the unprecedented events of the mid twentieth century: the Holocaust and the emergence of the State of Israel. Instead, peoplehood's limited currency today reflects a concept largely stuck in an outdated paradigm of identity construction. The modern (and novel) focus on the singular unifying concept of peoplehood made sense for a specific historical moment. However, its endurance severely limits the future theoretical possibilities for articulating communal definitions, politics, and practices of peoplehood.

My vision for peoplehood reflects another –hood paradigm—not nationhood, but “neighborhood.” The move from nationhood to neighborhood shifts the programmatic agenda of peoplehood from building unity to promoting diverse and potentially highly disconnected communities. A neighborhood model focuses on local engagement and individual experiences as the building blocks of Jewish peoplehood (where “local”, in the global/digital age, does not necessarily mean geographically close, but particular, specific, and contextual). Peoplehood based on a neighborhood, rather than nationhood, model promotes understanding Jewish collectivity as the sum of divergent processes of Jewish exploration and community building. As the sites of Jewish engagement, local communities should focus their energies on affirming their particular interpretations of Judaism and Jewish life.

“Neighborhoods” broadly construed, either in-person or via focused global networks, create a platform for engagement, meaning creation, and innovation, with Jewish

communities looking to develop what the software community calls open-source standards. Open-source software is non-proprietary, open to customization, and readily interchangeable. This paradigm meets the demands of Jews who no longer find specific identity packages (such as denominational logic or the binary distinction between particularist and Universalist) relevant. An open-source model promotes multiple entry-points, recognizes diverse interests, and allows creative self-expression.

A neighborhood paradigm deemphasizes the ideal of unity and promotes disaggregation of Jewish institutions and communities. The breakdown of centralized states and non-state institutions is a reality that, if ignored, will simply offer models of community and collectivity based on outdated assumptions, privileging numbers and power over individual meaning making and grass-roots organization. A neighborhood approach instead promotes local, informal expressions of collectivity, rather than overarching institutional centers. Micro-communities emerge as the creators and perpetuators of the ongoing project of Jewish peoplehood. Divergent and grassroots expressions of Jewish involvement are not signs of the end of Jewish peoplehood, but the basis for its future. Vibrant collective life cannot rely on one center to disseminate the meaning of identity. The legacy of Achad Ha-am's vision of a cultural center is a vestige of cultural nationalism that has little relevance for either local or global models of collectivity. As Simon Rawidowicz pointed out decades ago, the meaning of Jewish engagement and membership is a highly localized phenomenon that cannot be exported from one context to another.

A sense of connection to a larger entity will be generated most authentically—and thus enduringly—from the bottom-up. Grassroots communities provide open spaces to raise questions about Jewish identity and what, if anything, binds Jews to one another. It is the very act of engaging with these local and personal issues that engages individuals in the meaning of peoplehood. Smaller communities whose mission does not necessarily include promoting peoplehood are not a threat to peoplehood; instead, the emergence of group differentiation around interest, location, or age cohort creates the building blocks of the Jewish people. A foreign center and the abstract claims of shared set of values will only continue to lose their efficacy as rhetoric of unity. Only Judaism itself—and by that I mean the exploration of Jewish tradition and Jewish life in its manifold expressions—can inspire a global sense of interconnectedness.

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Jewish Peoplehood – Action Items

Partial list

Yahal Porat

In this short paper I will try to share a few insights and observations accumulated over the last year of directing the Israel-New York connections portfolio in Jerusalem. The Israel-New York connections oversees joint programs which engage Jewish institutions in NY with “peer” Israeli organizations (JCCs-Matnasim, Hillels, Congregations, etc.) with the aim of enhancing their connections and nurturing a spirit of Jewish Peoplehood. All of these programs include face to face encounters (“mifgashim” in Hebrew) which represent the highlight of the joint program.

How does programming change when the Peoplehood lens is being used? Traditional “Mifgash programs”, operating now for a good 18 years, aim to bring Jews together and develop long and lasting meaningful relationships, where Jews are “Arevim ze L’aze”. Those programs have touched tens of thousands individuals from Israel and the Diaspora, and transformed many who have become advocates of the necessity of the “Keshet” (connections in Hebrew) between Jews everywhere on the globe.

In my eyes, the Peoplehood lens brings a change of focus: the short term Mifgash ceases to be an end in its own right and becomes the means for further work. The real work only begin once the Mifgash ends: On the base of this fundamental and unique experience the real Peoplehood path opens before us. Our programs’ participants are expected to come back to their communities, organizations and daily lives to work for the Jewish people. We know that the experience participants had during the Mifgash programs is often life changing, but the real measure of success will be the social change programs that the alumni will operate in their home communities as a network of activists for the Jewish collective.

Israel engagement programs Recently one program participant commented: “it is amazing to see again how Israel is important to our two

sister communities and how excited they are to be here with us in our big community event”. Embracing the unique place of Israel is indeed a Peoplehood goal, as this is the state of the Jewish people.

The Peoplehood discourse allows us to relate to Israel not only from a narrow political point of view but also through the broad lens of the Jewish collective perspective. The participants in the peoplehood programs come from varied cultural, geographical, lingual and religious backgrounds. This context is conducive for an open discussion where different points of view about Israel can be brought to the table: traditional Zionism vs. Babylon-Jerusalem. Greater (Promised Land) Israel vs. the Israel of the 1967 borders. “Halachick Judaism” vs. “ethnic Judaism”. And more. Agreeing that the peace among us (Shevet Achim Gam Yachad) is more important than one’s “truth”, can define our new public conversation space. A space where we meet and exchange ideas, but commit to stay unified even as we disagree respectfully.

One of a kind or part of a family? There are numerous travel and “Mifgash” programs and a variety of initiatives operated in NA, Israel, Europe and around the globe. While those programs may have somewhat different goals, there is considerable potential in the conversation between these programs. When similar programs, such as Mifgash programs for example, take place in a specific geographic area at the same time, they should not only know about each other but make sure they coordinate an inter-program Mifgash. This requires a network of agents that seek opportunities to join forces between programs for the sake of creating additional “Peoplehood moments” (as well as cheaper logistics costs). This search for collaboration between programs should be built into their planning process.

What should the impact of Peoplehood programs be? While I am not sure that we have a full answer yet, the answer is to be found, as I pointed out at the opening, in the post program effect. We need to agree that we are all in the business of social change within the Jewish polity. If so, program alumni should be considered change agents in their communities as well as being part of a network. While today we are seeking a meaningful outlet for those change agents in existing structures, the “fourth sector” model can provide a new horizon. The fourth sector model suggests a unique hybrid approach that seeks to maximize social benefit while income is being earned (rather than contributed). In a

world of diminishing philanthropic funds and economic instability, and when younger generations are no longer consumers but prosumers, this model can point to new ways to work within the Jewish world. Using the globalizations processes to bring a local community into a network of worldwide communities through the skills and energies of program alumni will be a win for all.

Peoplehood in practice – what does it look like? Our work on developing peoplehood program is beginning to take shape. We have gone through a cognitive process – learning about the Jewish people, traditions, mutual responsibility, Israel and more. We have also developed an emotional/spiritual sense of being part of the Jewish people that we believe imparts a greater sense of caring for fellow Jews wherever they are. One area that needs to be further developed is the behavioral aspect: what are the mitzvot or rituals of Jewish peoplehood one should fulfill? How should we express the imperative of “V’eAhavta Le’reacha Camocha”? How should we as members of our people express in concrete terms, our collective commitment to justice and Tikun Olam?

I want to propose that the very essence of Jewish existence is community life. Being active in a communal life which is both local and global, can have a significant Peoplehood impact. Imagine for example a gathering of professional and volunteers’ activists on one thematic idea (say environmentalism) from around the Jewish globe. This can be both a beginning of a community and a unique Jewish contribution (Say Shmita) to the world.

Yahal Porat is director of NY-IL connections office, a joint initiative of the UJA-Federation of New York and the Jewish Agency for Israel. This portfolio includes supporting some 20 projects in Israel NY and Europe where through institutions and organizations a network of JP activists is built.



A Virtuous Cycle of Vibrant Jewish Life

Lynn Schusterman

When my late husband, Charles, and I embarked on our philanthropic journey 25 years ago, we were committed to doing our part to ensure a strong, vibrant future for the Jewish people and the State of Israel. We shared a vision of spreading the joy of Jewish living, giving and learning, and we sought to make our contribution where we could make the greatest difference.

Charlie and I identified our focus from the outset: we would invest in keeping the next generation of young Jews connected to and engaged with Jewish life and the Jewish state. “If you can get a bright and talented mind at a young age,” Charlie (z”l) wrote in one of his many notes, “you’ve got a lot with which to work.” To that he added: “If we are serious about Jewish renewal, we must make it more attractive to be Jewish.”

This philosophy has been our compass over the past two-plus decades. The path we have charted for our foundation aims to perpetuate a virtuous cycle of young adult engagement that promotes a culture of service, connects young people with Israel and welcomes all who seek to lead actively Jewish lives.

It begins with increasing numbers of young Jews participating in meaningful, relevant Jewish experiences that strengthen their ties to their Jewish identities and communities. As they become more deeply involved, they take ownership for creating compelling experiences that will attract their peers. Ultimately, they assume leadership roles in their communities, helping to shape and perpetuate a Jewish ecosystem equipped to engage future generations.

The focus of our foundation has remained steadfast, even as our approach has evolved to reflect the landscape in which we operate. We recognized early on that young Jews need opportunities to become and remain involved in Jewish life that speak to their personal interests and enable them to live as global citizens in accordance with Jewish values.

In response, we have developed two interdependent strategies that power the virtuous cycle by putting young Jews at the center of a continuum of Jewish experiences and opportunities.

First, we use grantmaking to support pluralistic organizations that directly engage large numbers of young Jews from teens to young adults. We focus on these years because they encompass critical life stages when people begin to assume increasing ownership over their identities.

Our support is targeted toward organizations that have a global reach with strong community-based components, including BBYO, Birthright, Hillel and Moishe House. We also support capacity building within particular fields, like service, LGBT inclusion and Israel advocacy. These investments engage young people through diverse interests and enable them to be actively involved in shaping their experiences.

Our grantmaking supports a pipeline of engagement in which individual Jewish journeys are nurtured from high school through college and into young adulthood. It requires organizations to work together to ensure smooth transitions across life stages. Ultimately, we want to see every teen who participates in BBYO welcomed onto the college campus by Hillel and other groups and effectively transitioned into post-college life with support from organizations like Moishe House and Birthright NEXT.

Second, we operate proprietary programs that invest in building the capacity of individuals who demonstrate significant leadership potential. We provide participants with a suite of opportunities for learning, skills-building, professional development and networking, with a particular focus on both entrepreneurs and those who are creating change from within organizations.

This strategy is grounded in a commitment to investing in people rather than programs and projects. It targets a specific subset of the young Jewish population, ranging from those who are deeply connected to those who are relatively unengaged. Specifically, our ROI Community nourishes the entrepreneurial talent of a global network of young innovators already working within the Jewish world. Our REALITY program helps to bring new social change agents into the fold through a values-focused curriculum.

Our dual grantmaking and programming strategies are mutually supportive, operating in tandem to engage as many young Jews as possible and build a pipeline of talent prepared to take the reins of leadership in their communities. They are designed to foster connections between people and organizations with complimentary interests, creating formal and informal networks that spark innovation, collaboration and empowered leadership.

Finally, they seek to ensure Israel's central role in the Jewish narrative. Many of our investments expand opportunities for young people to engage with and explore modern Israel, her rich history, diverse society and fertile cultural landscape. Ensuring an enduring connection between young Jews and the State of Israel is intimately tied to our broader investments in strengthening the social fabric of Israeli society, including working toward the renewal of Jerusalem as her modern, open capital.

We work together with a range of peers and partners who use different strategic approaches to make vital contributions toward shaping a strong Jewish ecosystem able to meet our community's needs today and evolve in the future.

Collectively, if we are successful, we will see a time when the vast majority of young people readily participate in Jewish life, draw on Jewish values to inform their worldviews and take on leadership roles in their communities. We will see their journeys supported by a global Jewish infrastructure that embraces, incubates and scales effective efforts to meet the needs and interests of all Jewish people. And we will see Jewish communities around the world, strengthened by a surge of engaged young people, an appetite for innovation and a strong communal infrastructure, connected to each other and contributing to the greater whole.

Indeed, we will achieve our shared vision of a diverse, dynamic Jewish people deeply connected to a strong State of Israel and committed to making the world a better place.

For 25 years we have been contributing to working toward this vision. In this time, we have seen the global Jewish community make great strides, and yet, we have a long way to go.

As we look toward the next 25 years, we remain committed to doing our part to perpetuate a virtuous cycle that leads to a vibrant, thriving Jewish community.

Lynn Schusterman is the Founder and Co-Chair of the Charles and Lynn Schusterman Philanthropic Network, a global enterprise that supports and creates innovative initiatives for the purpose of igniting the passion and unleashing the power in young people to create positive change for themselves, the Jewish community and the broader world.



Truth or Consequences

Sid Schwarz

Truth or Consequences was the first game show ever aired on commercial TV in the United States, appearing first as a pilot in 1941. It seems an apt phrase to describe the dilemma facing us today as we try to get a younger generation of Jews to have an affinity with Israel and the Jewish people. Starkly put, many Jewish-sponsored programs believe that we need to protect Jews from encountering any information that might put Israel in a less than morally righteous light. There seems to be no limit to the amount of money that can be raised for pro-Israel/hasbara organizations. While I am sympathetic to the motivations behind those organizations—creating a generation of Jews who appreciate the miracle of the state of Israel and its centrality to the Jewish people—I find the methodology to be problematic both ethically and pedagogically.

I have spent much of my career as a rabbi and educator with young people. In short, we are losing the battle for their hearts and minds because they don't believe that we—the Jewish community—is telling them the truth. The consequences for both Jewish identity in the diaspora and for support for and affinity with the state of Israel, is disastrous.

It need not be this way. For several decades I have created and run educational programs for young Jews designed to increase their social and political activism on a range of issues, including Israel and the Middle East. I have also run numerous trips to Israel to explore, not only the geo-politics of the region, but the Jewish and democratic nature of the state as well. In these efforts, I have consistently looked for people and organizations that can speak to the challenges that Israel faces on a range of issues—the peace process, relationship with the Diaspora, treatment of Palestinians in the territories, Jewish pluralism in Israel, attitudes towards and policies affecting Israeli Arabs, the income gap between various ethnic groups, etc.

With few exceptions the reactions are consistent. There is some initial shock at the extent of Israel's social and political challenges but then people realize that we are talking about a relative young country, existing in the midst of an undemocratic region of the world facing ongoing security challenges. They are impressed at the robust nature of Israeli civil society, a feature unique to democracies. They realize that Israel is not a Jewish Disneyland where everything is perfect. Most importantly, they appreciate that

they have been treated like adults, exposed to hard and often competing truths out of which they need to re-weave a narrative that makes sense to them.

Along these lines, this past year I helped to launch the Rene Cassin Fellowship Program (RCFP), a year long program on Judaism and human rights for young adults, ages 25-35, with hubs in New York, London and Jerusalem. With lead funding from the New York UJA/Federation's Commission on the Jewish People, the program includes monthly study sessions from a common syllabus, monthly chevruta discussions between and American, European and Israeli Fellows on the monthly sessions, impact projects to be implemented with specific NGO's and an Israel study tour.

Our study tour in Israel looked at some very challenging issues: the Arab minority; Bedouins; religious pluralism; security; settlements; African refugees; the nature of Zionism. Our presenters included government spokespeople, representatives from a wide array of NGOs and both Jews and Arabs. The interchange between Fellows from the three different regions was fascinating. A very politically progressive Israel found herself becoming an eloquent spokesperson for the merits of Zionism and the state of Israel despite its challenges. In turn, a very politically hawkish American Jew found herself so upset by our visit to Hebron and the treatment of Arabs there by the IDF and by Jewish settlers that politically left Israelis had to help her recover her Zionist balance.

To the extent that one of the goals of the RCFP is to strengthen the ties between young adult Jews in three centers of Jewish life (North America, Europe and Israel), it is clear that our theme of human rights created a common universe of discourse. In fact, many of the Fellows made clear that they would not have chosen to sign up for a more conventional program dealing with Israel sponsored by the Jewish community. They were drawn to the RCFP because they were convinced that the program was committed to a rigorous and critical look at international human rights, including Israel. The Fellows are among our best and brightest but many represent a constituency that most Jewish communities cannot access. The fact that the RCFP program spends considerable time helping Fellows appreciate the alignment between Jewish values and human rights values is one of many ways that gives participants a renewed sense of pride in their Jewish identities.

The responses to a variety of attitudinal questions on a questionnaire we administered on the last day of the program offers some insights into what participants took away from the program. The responses that were statistically significant included the following:



I have a better appreciation of the challenges that Israel faces in its attempt to balance its commitment to human rights with its commitment to security and the safety of its citizens.

- I feel connected to my Jewish identity as a result of this trip.
- I have a more nuanced understanding of the meaning of the term “Zionism”
- Israel is now more central to my identity as a Jew.
- I believe that Israel’s democracy is seriously at risk.

One of our European participants, who has participated in more Jewish community sponsored programs than any of the other 29 Fellows, wrote the following in his evaluation:

“This seminar reminded me what peoplehood is, or at least should be about. ...The program took ‘Israel engagement’ to a whole new level. Just as in relationships we can tell the difference between a flirt and real love – when we fall in love, it happens despite the other person’s problems, mistakes and issues. It’s the same with Israel: If we want young adults to have a strong bond and a real connection with Israel, we have to see the country without any make-up, as it is, with all its difficulties and challenges. That was the main gift given to those of us who were privileged to participate in the RCFP Israel study tour.”

The message that we were able to convey is that Israel is both a sovereign nation but that, on a larger level, it is a joint venture of the Jewish people. That sends an empowering message to young Jews that their engagement can make a difference in Israel. The lesson for those who care about strengthening the Jewish people is that we need to meet today’s young adults where they are at and help them articulate what is at the root of our collective Jewish enterprise. This is the only way to engage Next Gen Jews.

The RCFP program is charting an educational methodology that is desperately needed in the Jewish world because there are thousands of young Jewish adults who can be more deeply engaged in the Jewish peoplehood conversation with a program that resonates with their values about creating a more just and peaceful world. Unless we are prepared to engage in this conversation in a critical and truthful way, the consequences will not be pretty.

Rabbi Sid Schwarz is the director of the Rene Cassin Fellowship Program. He founded and led PANIM: The Institute for Jewish Leadership and Values for 21 years. He is also the author of the recently published Jewish Megatrends: Charting the Course of the American Jewish Community (Jewish Lights).



The Mitzvot of Peoplehood – Some Proposals

Einat Wilf

More than eight years ago I published an article titled “The Mitzvot of Peoplehood” (<http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-3041999,00.html>) where I posed the following question: “I’m a member of the Jewish People. So what should I do when I wake up in the morning?” I’ve spent the years since I posed this question thinking and speaking about it and formulating ideas in response to it. So this might be a good time to write down some of the answers.

In that article I defined Jewish Peoplehood as “the instinctive feeling that one is a member of one Jewish People present around the world.” If the instinct exists, then the Mitzvot are necessary merely to give shape and form to it. However, if the instinct does not exist, the Mitzvot of peoplehood might be necessary to actively nurture that instinct. The Mitzvot of peoplehood, much like the known Mitzvot, then become the “what” and the “how”, the substance and the mechanism, by which one is a member of the Jewish people.

Proposed here are five potential avenues of action to nurture the sense of belonging to a Jewish people globally: the first “Global Minyans” argues for creating as many possible opportunities for encounters for Jews from different countries, speaking different languages and of different background; the second “A Jewish Family Tree” explores the implications of the exciting possibility that we are perhaps no more than a decade away from being able to map the entire Jewish people on one family tree, backed by genetic data; The third “Israel” argues for circulating all Jews through Israel, regardless of where they live permanently; the fourth “Hebrew” promotes the idea that we should establish the teaching and learning of Hebrew as a peoplehood Mitzvah, but find new and better ways of doing so; and finally “recognition” discusses the ways in which we can continue to encourage and recognize new thinking and action on peoplehood.

Global Minyans

My personal experience has been that whenever Jews, especially from a wide range of countries, languages and backgrounds, get together physically, magic happens. It is difficult to explain, but for some reason, the mere act of getting together, creates

a sense of belonging to the people at large. Such encounters are the equivalent of prayer Minyans – they make the abstract idea of a global Jewish peoplehood real to the individual Jew. These meetings can be for anything and about anything, but to be effective they have to include Jews from several different countries. Global cannot be Just Israel and the US. The encounters must also include a component of discussion and learning about Jewishness, Jewish values, and anything Jewish – the equivalent of prayer. As my favorite definition of “Who is a Jew?” says: “A Jew is someone who gets together with other Jews to discuss ‘who is a Jew?’” The goal should be to make sure that all Jews throughout their lives engage in some kind of “global Minyans”.

A global Jewish Family Genetic Tree The Jewish people are probably no more than a decade away from being able to map the entire people on one family tree backed by genetic data. Social networking family tree sites are enabling more and more people to connect their family trees to those of others. In parallel, at less than a hundred dollars, genetic mapping services are becoming so affordable, that more and more people are likely to get them. These services will collect data that will allow linking all of humanity with each other and to its ancestry. For the Jewish people, adding that to the remarkable work being done at Yad Vashem, as well Israel's official records, this means that the vision of an entire Jewish people linked on a single map, is within grasp. If all Jews, (it would be nice if the Ultra-Orthodox would share their trees too), were to perform this Mitzva of peoplehood, the sense of belonging to the Jewish people would not just be one of instinct any more, it would be fact. Individuals would be able to see how they fit in to a global Jewish people, and back in history. Some people might discover Jewish ancestry where they didn't expect in and others the opposite. It would raise questions, personal and collective, of what it means to belong, but for the first time in history, this question would be grounded in clearly observable facts.

Israel For Israel to be a Mitzva of peoplehood, the issue of permanence should be put aside. Zionism posited that all Jews should live in Israel. That was the Zionist imperative. But with nearly half of the world's Jews living in Israel, forming the largest and only substantially growing Jewish community, Israel can be a non-permanent Mitzva for all others. If Israel's is not the first home of all Jews, it should at least be their second. This is not about real-estate, but about having a life-long meaningful relationship with the country and its people. It means regularly visiting Israel, spending extended periods of professional and personal development in the country, learning Hebrew (see next), studying its recent and ancient history, consuming its culture, following its news and defending its existence. Israelis too should spend time outside of Israel familiarizing

themselves with Jewish life outside Israel. It's good that half of the world's Jews live in Israel, but with modern communications and cheap airfare, it doesn't have to be the same half all the time...

Hebrew I used to think that Hebrew is not important for Jewish peoplehood. My assumption was that English is the new Aramaic, the new Yiddish, the new Ladino – the Lingua Franca, the spoken language of the Jewish people. But I have become convinced that there is a special value to learning and knowing Hebrew for all Jews. Hebrew is the foundational Mitzva. It connects Jews to their culture – ancient and modern, to their land, old and new, and to the millions of Jews who speak it. But to succeed, Hebrew teaching has to break out of the tedious and ineffective box of Sunday school classes. Hebrew teaching needs to go the way of French, Spanish and Italian – a total immersion experience connected to the culture and the land. It is more effective to send children to six weeks of Hebrew immersion summer camp in Israel, than to spend a year in Sunday school. Adults who have seen the sights, can come to Israel for two to four week courses in Tel-Aviv or the Eilat or the Sea of Galilee, and enjoy a more meaningful vacation. Hebrew needs to be peoplehood Mitzva, but not of the fun luxurious kind, and not the onerous chore one that it is today.

Recognition Finally, since we are still far from having a strong and accepted canon of the Mitzvot of peoplehood, we need to recognize and support those who do and think peoplehood. We should have prizes, grants, fellowships, for thinkers and entrepreneurs who through their words and deeds are helping define the why, how and what of peoplehood. And then, when one day we feel we have satisfactorily answered the question of the Mitzvot of Peoplehood, we can close the canon book and begin arguing with each other on the necessary level of observance...

Dr. Einat Wilf, a Senior Fellow with the Jewish People Policy Institute, was Chair of the Education, Sports and Culture Committee and Chair of the Knesset Sub-Committee for Israel and the Jewish People in the 18th Knesset. Dr. Wilf is the author of three books that explore key issues in Israeli society. www.wilf.org

