

peoplehood:  
a sense of

כל ישראל  
ערבים זה בזה

belonging  
to a people

## The Peoplehood Papers **2**

A selection of essays on Jewish Peoplehood including pragmatic suggestions on how organizations can create new understandings and action plans around the issue.

Spring 2008



**Beth Hatefutsoth**  
THE NAHUM GOLDMANN MUSEUM OF THE JEWISH DIASPORA  
A WORLD CENTER FOR JEWISH PEOPLEHOOD

INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL FOR JEWISH PEOPLEHOOD STUDIES  
Founded by the NADAV Fund

**The Peoplehood Papers** was created as a platform for enriching the Jewish Peoplehood conversation. It is a collaboration of United Jewish Communities, The International School for Jewish Peoplehood Studies at Beth Hatefutsoth and Koldor.

In response to great interest in the pilot issue of The Peoplehood Papers (published for the 2007 General Assembly), this resource has now become a regular publication aimed at providing a space for sharing ideas about Jewish Peoplehood, the Jewish future and related matters.

This edition features articles from a diverse group of Jewish leaders and thinkers and covers philosophical aspects of Jewish Peoplehood as well as practical implications for Jewish organizations, schools and communities.

If you would like to contribute an article to future editions please submit your paper to: [bhschool@post.tau.ac.il](mailto:bhschool@post.tau.ac.il)

We would like to thank all the contributors who put their creativity and dedication to the Jewish future on paper. Their ideas will no doubt inspire you

As Passover approaches, we would like to wish you, your family and the whole Jewish People "Chag Sameach."

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## Ready, Steady, Go!

### Midrashic Applications of Jewish Peoplehood Education

Shelly Keder

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**H**ow do Israeli Jews understand, maintain and act upon the connection between themselves and Jews who live elsewhere?

Benedict Anderson in his book *Imagined Communities*<sup>1</sup> focused on the concept of “nation,” asking how is it that people can identify with millions of others in a nation-state such as France or England without ever meeting face to face. Why would someone regard a total stranger as a fellow compatriot – a Frenchman or Englishman? By the same token, we ask: how is it that an Israeli Jew might come to regard individuals living in other areas of the world, whom he or she may never meet in a face to face interaction, as members of a common community?<sup>2</sup>

Since its inception 1998, Lokey Academy, within the Leo Baeck Education Center in Haifa, is spearheading a process of transformation from a s/State of individualism<sup>3</sup> to different levels of ‘peoplehood’. Through intensive, relevant and creative educational processes, the Lokey Academy reaches a growing number of students and educators throughout Israel and the Jewish world each year, who engage with Jewish Peoplehood education. The following is a brief description of the key concepts and methods of created and applied by the Lokey Academy in this field.

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<sup>1</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (New York: Verso, 1991).

<sup>2</sup> Also see Ezra Kopelowitz, "Ethno-Religious Vs. Religious Ritual: A Look at a Learning Ritual That Brings Together American and Israeli, Orthodox and Non-Orthodox Jews," *Research in the Social Scientific Study of Religion* 13 (2002). Ezra Kopelowitz, "The Concept of "Ethno-Religion" and Its Consequences for Differentiation Theory in the Sociology of Religion: A Case Study of Attitudes Towards Food Handling Rituals among Israeli Jews," (submitted for publication).

<sup>3</sup> Jonathan Boyd. *The Sovereign and Situated Self*. UJIA, 2003.

## Two by Three

One of the key texts of Jewish Peoplehood is: "You are all *nitzavim* today"(Deuteronomy 29:9). The *midrash* in *Koheleth Rabbah* I, 12:1 reveals the following assumption: "You are *nitzavim* on this day all of you – this should have been at the beginning of the book, only the Torah does not follow a chronological order". Thinking along these *midrashic* lines, we use the concept of *nitzavim* as the beginning and the 'end'<sup>1</sup> of Jewish Peoplehood education. Hebrew grammar supports our *midrash*, as *Nitzavim* is defined as a present action; entailing the process of ascertaining a position as well as reaching the final outcome, namely: taking a stand. Thus, our idea of Jewish Peoplehood education is: *Nitzavim* as the vision and on-going search, as well as the living realization, of Jewish Peoplehood in our time.

Benjamin Bloom identified three domains of educational activities: Cognitive: mental skills (*Knowledge*); Affective: growth in feelings or emotional areas (*Attitude*); Psychomotor: manual or physical skills (*Skills*)<sup>2</sup>. Similarly, we have further "drashed" the *nitzavim* concept, and created a tripartite model of achieving it. We believe, that all three parts of this *midrash* model are crucial for achieving the idea of *nitzavim*, and that each side of it derives from an essential question:

- "Ready": What is the vital knowledge for being part of the Jewish People?
- "Steady": What are the emotional frameworks for maintaining a relationship with the Jewish People?
- "Go": What are the necessary actions of a meaningful relationship with the Jewish People?

The process by which this model was created was in itself very meaningful and generated a new educational conversation. Thus, this "two by three" model, serves us as a language and a frame for creating a wide array of educational programs for both students and educators. Our challenge is to ensure that each program engages all three model aspects, while appreciating and reflecting upon the *Nitzavim* dichotomy. We believe that this model is a "hands-on" tool, which may serve educators in their striving for an educational framework for Jewish Peoplehood education.

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<sup>1</sup> This end of course means – a goal, a target.

<sup>2</sup> Bloom B. S. (1956). *Taxonomy of Educational Objectives, Handbook I: The Cognitive Domain*. New York: David McKay Co Inc.

## **Sample Curricula and Programs**

***Yachdav School-to-School program:*** an original modular curriculum in which elementary school students in Israel and abroad, study a parallel Jewish studies curriculum, exploring their own Jewish identity while learning about their partners' families, communities, beliefs and connections to the Jewish world. The program engages students from the 1<sup>st</sup> grade onwards and includes themes like: the Jewish calendar, identity circles and journey through the Jewish world.

***Tzmatim (Junctures)*** introduces students to a unique and dynamic way of looking at Jewish history through a series of watershed events. Middle school students study about key turning point in our shared history and create their vision and reality of the Jewish People's present and future.

***Young Ambassadors:*** Every year, 10-12 Leo Baeck High School students travel to the USA to represent Leo Baeck and Israel within Jewish communities, living with host families, attending school with their adopted siblings, and becoming active in their congregations for a period of four months, from September through December. The program has had an enormous impact on both sides' views of the Jewish people.

***Youth Exchange Programs:*** Leo Baeck 10<sup>th</sup>, 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> graders take part in youth exchange *mifgash* program, in partnership with the Liberal and Reform communities of Great Britain. The face to face encounter takes place in London as well as Haifa, and friendships are maintained for many years.

***Training for Jewish Educators:*** The Leo Baeck Education Center has initiated a unique training program to create a cadre of educators who are able to impart the commitment to Jewish Peoplehood Education. Fifteen educators participate in the program each year, learning from traditional and modern Jewish thought, experiencing and experimenting with Jewish ritual and devoting time to forming their "stand". In addition, intensive professional development seminars are created and implemented by the Lokey Academy staff, in Israel and abroad. Each program includes educational peers *mifgash* devoted to sharing best practices and challenges.

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# **A Framework for Strategic Thinking**

## **About Jewish Peoplehood\***

By Dr. Ezra Kopelowitz and Ari Engelberg

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\*Excerpt from paper commissioned by the NADAV Fund

### **Introduction**

Since 2000, a small but growing number of Jewish organizations and foundations have started using the concept of “Jewish Peoplehood” in their work. What is the significance of this new concept? What is the added value of the “Jewish Peoplehood” concept for the world of Jewish organizations? Why use the concept as a basis for organizational development, whether for strategic planning, program development or fund raising? Is there a difference between an organization or program run under the banner of Jewish Peoplehood and one which is not?

We don’t aspire to answer all of these questions in this paper, but we do hope to make a first contribution towards organizing existing knowledge about the subject. The paper will be divided into the following four sections:

### **A Historical Overview**

We begin with a short historical overview that focuses on the innovative nature of the Jewish Peoplehood concept. While “the Jewish People” is an ancient idea, the term “Jewish Peoplehood” as it is currently used, is very new. Whereas before 2000 the term was hardly used by Jewish organizations, today it is a central concept in the strategic planning of a growing number of leading Jewish organizations. As we will detail below, conferences are being held about the concept, books are being written, funders are giving increasing amounts of money to programs that use the Jewish Peoplehood concept and leading Jewish organizations are using Peoplehood as a central organizing concept. What is the historical significance of the sudden interest in the concept of Jewish Peoplehood?

## **A Guide to Current Intellectual Thought about Jewish Peoplehood**

Alongside the use of the Peoplehood concept by Jewish organizations, there is a parallel growth of intellectual interest in the topic since 2000. The intellectual discussion asks: What is “Jewish Peoplehood?” What are the key characteristics that distinguish Jewish Peoplehood from other concepts? We will provide an overview of the main schools of intellectual thought about Jewish Peoplehood and provide summaries of the positions taken by leading Jewish thinkers on the topic. We will also sketch the intellectual boundaries of the Peoplehood concept, by asking “what is not Peoplehood?”

### **Translating Theory to Action**

An applied theory of Peoplehood is needed if an organization is to create coherent answers to questions of “how” to develop programs and “what” are the appropriate standards for measuring accomplishment and success. Unfortunately, little is currently being done to use intellectual discourse on Jewish Peoplehood as a basis for organizational planning.

Intellectual discussion about Jewish Peoplehood and the Jewish organizations which use the concept as an organizing banner currently exist on two different planes that rarely connect. On one hand, most organizations use the concept, out of a gut feeling that it will help them raise money and develop programs. On the other hand, most intellectuals are discussing the concept without reference to the world of Jewish organizations. The result are growing amounts of financial and personnel resources devoted to the concept of Jewish Peoplehood, without the level of planning and discussion needed to evaluate if there is any added value for the Jewish People.

We will provide an initial overview of foundations and organizations doing work in the field, and highlight the work of those that are making a serious attempt to bring the theory and practice of Jewish Peoplehood under one umbrella. We will also look at existing social science research that can serve as a resource for those who wish to learn about work being done in the field.



## Doing Peoplehood

While the paper focuses on intellectuals and organizations that are consciously promoting the “Jewish Peoplehood” concept, we end the paper by taking note of an obvious ambiguity. There are many organizations that by their very nature enable Jews from across the ideological spectrum of Jewish life to interact with one another or expose their constituents to the wider Jewish world. Most of these organizations are not using the term “Jewish Peoplehood” to categorize their work, but are in fact "building Jewish Peoplehood". These organizations include community oriented organizations, educational institutions, organizations that promote partnerships between Jewish organizations and encounters between Jews from different backgrounds and research/policy organizations.

Although a discussion of this sort requires a separate paper, we will outline elements that are common to organizations that "build Jewish peoplehood in practice."<sup>1</sup> These elements should be considered in a policy discussion aimed at strengthening and shaping the infrastructure needed by organizations who are now organizing their work under the banner of Jewish Peoplehood.

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<sup>1</sup> Note we capitalize the word Peoplehood, when using the concept as a proper noun – i.e, specifically referring to the concept of “JewishPeoplehood”. Otherwise, when referring to organizations that build Jewish peoplehood, or the like, it is left as lowercase.

# Spreading the Word on Jewish Peoplehood\*

Dr. Michael C. Kotzin

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\*as published in The Jewish Week, November 21, 2007

*Editor's Note: In October, The Jewish Week sponsored its third annual retreat, The Conversation, for a group of American Jews who are leaders and emerging leaders in a variety of fields. They were invited to contribute essays about the conference itself or about ideas that emerged from their discussions. This is the first in a series of responses.*

The subject of Jewish peoplehood is in the air, with attention now focused on what practical steps might be taken to ensure the continuity of the Jewish people at a time when that continuity is challenged by a number of factors. Those factors include high levels of assimilation, low birth rates and small numbers to start with.

Surely this is important work. All the same, at least as important is the development of an informed analysis, and, as the times seem to require, an articulate defense and appreciation of the concept of Jewish peoplehood.

This is a complex matter. The very idea of peoplehood — a unique and unfamiliar concept — is regarded by some as smacking of a narrow particularism that runs up against the fashionable universalism of the age. In the eyes of those who question its acceptability, the idea is associated with a primary evil of our time, racism. When linked to Zionist ideology, the concept of Jewish peoplehood is accused of being especially abhorrent and retrograde by post-nationalists who dominate much of the European intellectual scene and have a presence on American — and even Israeli — campuses.

Based in part on the biblical reference to a “chosen people,” the religious dimension of Jewish peoplehood is made problematic when it is regarded as a selfish and unfair sense of superiority, an interpretation that has contributed to anti-Semitic stereotyping for centuries. Meanwhile, though it is at odds with the historic experiences and traditional beliefs of the Jewish people, and it is both misleading and dangerous in its way, the contra-peoplehood

notion that Judaism is merely a religion like any other religion and should see itself and be seen by others solely in that fashion is something that some might consider a natural formulation in today's world.

These challenges make it all the more difficult but also all the more essential to create a positive, informed study of Jewish peoplehood and to spread the word. Such an approach would help Jews — both in the diaspora and in Israel — better understand the ties that bring them together, ties that are increasingly important in today's world. It would also help create a moral and intellectual bulwark against those who deny the legitimacy of the State of Israel, the practical expression of Jewish peoplehood today.

A project of this sort would call for research and an examination of ideas from biblical times through the modern era and for the framing of an argument regarding Jewish peoplehood that counters the postmodern challenges to the concept. Such an approach would show how the concept of Jewish peoplehood is rooted in the biblical text that describes how Jews first came together and conceived of themselves as a people while enslaved in the land of Egypt.

As the narrative continues, the Children of Israel, liberated and led by Moses, made their way to Mount Sinai, where they were “chosen” to keep God's commandments. After wending their way to the Promised Land, it was as a people that the Jews established sovereignty in that land, and as a people that they were exiled from it. In Babylon, they were strangers in a strange land once more and they remembered and yearned for Zion. After returning, they subsequently faced exile once more, this time for centuries.

The kind of approach I am thinking of would move from biblical narrative to historical review and show how it was as a people that, during the post-exile centuries, the Jews suffered persecution and faced genocide; as a people that they continued to recall the exhilaration of the exodus from Egypt and the glories of Jerusalem; and as a people that, inspired by Zionist ideology, they returned to the ancient land of their people, re-established sovereignty, and re-entered the history of nations. Finally, it is as a people that the Jews of the world retain and reinvigorate their sense of connection and the ties that bind them to one another.

There is of course much more to the story of the Jews. But in its basic form it is the story of a people — a people with the charge of being a light unto the nations, and a people striving to understand and shape its destiny in the contemporary world. It is a story that today bears telling and study if the steps being advanced to attempt to ensure Jewish continuity are to have a true and lasting impact.

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# Breaking the Glass: Jewish Peoplehood and Beyond

Dr. Alisa Rubin Kurshan

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Every Jewish wedding ends with a broken glass. But right before the groom raises his foot, the Rabbi tells those assembled that the tradition symbolizes the brokenness in the history of the Jewish people, especially the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem. He reminds the congregation that their fate and fortune are forever bound up with the destiny of the Jewish people.

There are very few examples in Judaism of customs or mitzvot that are “peoplehood mitzvot,” acts that remind us that we are all tied to each other’s destiny. This is one that resonates every time a Jewish couple stands under the chuppah.

While the Torah may not offer many specific mitzvot related to peoplehood, the exact moment Jews became a people is well documented. Throughout the first book of the Torah, the Israelites have been described as *B’nei Yisrael*, “the children of Israel.” But as the Israelites prepare to enter the Promised Land for the first time, they are no longer just the children of Israel. For the first time, the children of Israel are a people. The words read in Exodus 9:13: “*Shalach et ami* — Let my people go.”

This line has important implications. The Israelites were about to become something they had not been before. Until now, they had been linked vertically, by biological descent. They had a common ancestor, Jacob, who was also given the name Israel. *B’nei Yisrael* described his descendants; they were part of the same family tree.

With the subtle shift from *B’nei Yisrael*, the children of Israel, to *Am Yisrael*, the people or nation of Israel, God was preparing the Israelites for a new mode of existence. Now they would be linked horizontally to one another. They are no longer defined as children of the same parent. They are about to become moral adults. Their unity is no longer a matter of a common familial past; they were about to create a shared future. They would no longer exist in a state of dependency, relying on Moses and through him, God, to provide for their needs, welfare, and safety. Henceforth, they would have to take responsibility for one another.

Through this subtle linguistic shift, the Israelites were taught that once they crossed the Jordan they would have to learn to function collectively. Israel, the people, would be defined by the covenant their parents had made at Mount Sinai. It would be their constitution, their mission, their task, and their destiny. They would no longer be a band of disparate individuals bound only by blood; now they would become a people.

Peoplehood has long been a driving force in Jewish decision-making on both the individual and communal level. For decades, Jews cared about *aliyah* and *klitah* — helping Jews immigrate and assimilate into new communities — because of a sense of connection that transcended geography.

Many of UJA-Federation’s donors expressed their sense of peoplehood by giving to the annual campaign. While their parents or grandparents were fortunate to have come to America, others were not as lucky. The fortunate ones felt an obligation to do their part, thinking, “I will rescue Jews whenever they are in need of help, wherever they are in the world. Because they are us and we are them.”

So why does the language of peoplehood language seem relatively new? Perhaps it is because peoplehood was taken for granted as long as external forces kept us a people. If those borders were once physical — as they were in the ghettos — or more invisible — discrimination, anti-Semitism, marriage patterns, acceptance rates in elite universities, etc. — now they are neither visible nor invisible. They no longer exist. With this, however, fewer Jewish couples stand under a chuppah and hear or even believe that their fate and fortune are bound with the destiny of the Jewish people.

The Jewish community has responded. Partnership 2000 was created in the early 1990’s as a way of expressing our sense of peoplehood, binding North American communities to Israel. The Commission on the Jewish People was created at UJA-Federation to acknowledge a need to be proactive in working to maintain collective cohesiveness, given that external forces had thankfully eroded. The goal was to creatively build denominational, ethnic, and North American/Israeli ties among and between all divides.

There is still much debate about the peoplehood movement. Misha Galperin says all he needs to evoke strong peoplehood emotions is a pair of Levi’s jeans. Jay Michaelson

believes peoplehood efforts are leading to meaningless, watered down, vacuous Judaism. For some Israelis, peoplehood is North American Jews' rationalization for not choosing to make *aliyah*. And there are those who question if there really is such a way to build a sense of peoplehood as a separate variable to building more caring and literate Jews.

Considering the history of the peoplehood movement within the context of the continuity movement provides clarity. The continuity movement, which began in the early 90's, addressed a new reality where being Jewish was no longer seen as a matter of survival but a matter of choice. Many found themselves confronted with the existential question: "Why should I be Jewish?" This question evolved into the equally complex: "Why and how should I identify as a Jew? What does it mean to belong to the Jewish community?"

We have some of the intellectual architects of the continuity movement to thank for placing this concern of strengthening Jewish identity and improving Jewish education within the goal of revitalizing Jewish community. Barry Shrage, John Ruskay, and others argued early on that our focus must be on the creation of compelling communities that were inclusive not exclusive and embedded in principles of Torah, Tzedek, and Hesed. They argued that quality Jewish education devoid of living Jewish communities would be insufficient to create a true renaissance here in North America.

For the past 15 years, we have embarked on multiple strategies to foster engaged, literate, responsible, Jewish communities with the hope that the power of the experience would convince Jews to want to learn and connect more. Whether it has been promoting Israel experience, Jewish summer camping, adult Jewish learning, we have understood that strengthening Jewish identity is not an end in itself. It is only within the context of a living, vibrant, dynamic Jewish community that Judaism can flourish and blossom.

While the continuity movement was unfolding, sociologists began to uncover growing trends towards a personalist form of Judaism. During the early 1990's, as the search for meaning and community in American society influenced American Judaism, the focus on creating intimate and transformational Jewish communal experiences grew dramatically. The Jewish continuity movement became part of that trend.

One of the great contributions of the continuity movement was its full embrace of a healthy and vibrant Jewish life in America. Many were proud that their own Jewish identity was based on positive Jewish experiences, including Jewish summer camp experiences, youth groups, and Israel experiences. Beyond lachrymose readings of Jewish history, or Israel at risk, or simply the vicarious Judaism of our grandparents, many could find a sense of meaning and purpose in building communities that were at once intimate and transcendent.

If one of the successes of the Jewish continuity movement was the reawakening of creativity within the North American Jewish community, it is also important to note that one of the unintended consequences of this movement was reinforcing broader societal individualistic, perhaps narcissistic, trends. A key question of the continuity movement was: “Does my Judaism provide a sense of meaning and purpose to *me*?” It did not address our responsibility to the collective. The line of questioning needed to look beyond the individual to include others, so that one might ask: “How does my sense of belonging connect me through time and space to the Israelites in Egypt, to Jews in the early days of the *Haskalah*, to Jews in the former Soviet Union today, or to grooms who have broken the glass under the *chuppah* for centuries?”

In some cases, the focus on the individual has led to a rejection of the collective. If one doesn't like local shuls, he or she may create an independent *minyan* with a few like-minded friends. If one doesn't like the way a federation operates, he or she may start a *tzedakah* fund or private foundation.

Forging a strong sense of Jewish identity without a full appreciation for the power of Judaism as a collectivist religion is insufficient to create the vibrant, dynamic communities needed to bring about the renaissance of Jewish life. The question of, “Why be Jewish?,” has been met with a set of responses that basically argue that Judaism can provide a source of meaning, belonging, community, and a sense of the holy in one's life. Only now is an understanding beginning to develop that once personally engaged, Jews are more likely to also seek to connect to the history and destiny of the Jewish people.

As a community, we want Jews in North America to not only ask, “Why should I be Jewish?” but also, “Why should I care about other Jews? What is my connection to Jews



across the globe? How do I take all of my new understandings of Jewish values and put them into action? How do I become part of a Jewish community so that I can actualize my appreciation for the value of *Kol Yisrael arevim zeh lazeh*?"

The past 40 years have taught us that crisis cannot be used to teach this message. Some called the summer of 2006 the summer of Jewish peoplehood. Both Israelis and North Americans came to appreciate their interdependence as never before. As the war raged in Israel, many North Americans woke up to the fact that it was not just their history that defined them as a Jewish people, but that their destiny was linked to the fate and fortune of the state of Israel.

North American Jews realized anew how dependent they were on a safe Israel. And in addition to dependence, they learned how emotionally attached they are to Israel. They suddenly felt more vulnerable as Jews in America. Some asked in hushed tones whether they had taken the very existence of the state of Israel for granted. They considered what would have to be done to secure its future.

Israelis realized anew their dependence on the solidarity and support of North American Jews. Op-ed pieces appeared in Israeli press calling North American Jews a strategic asset to Israel. Many Jews relearned that summer that they were more than part of *Bnai Israel*. They were also part of *Am Yisrael*. Some would say this thinking was why the federations' Israel Emergency Campaign was so successful.

Yet, with the exception in a blip in summer 2006, the lack of connection between North American Jews and Israel continue to grow with each survey. Interdependence based on crisis does not endure.

It was from this realization nine years ago that UJA-Federation's Commission on the Jewish People was born. Its purpose is to develop strategies that weave our community together in new ways. It seeks to find new ways to animate Jews by the incredible fact that we have lasted as a people for more than 5000-plus years and have much to contribute to society at large.

While we have learned that Jewish caring and strong Jewish identity can lead to a sense of belonging to a Jewish people, there is much we need to do to prod Jews on this journey from being part of *Bnai Yisrael* to being *Am Yisrael*. In fact, there are concrete steps that can be taken on the road to building Jewish peoplehood. First, a curriculum needs to be developed to teach what it means to be part of the collective.

To be sure, it is also about creating a vibrant Jewish culture, and it is about maximizing technology to connect Jews to one another. Social justice also plays a big role in this process. This is the goal behind Break New Ground, a new program which aspires to have every one of the 65,000 Jewish college students in New York participating in meaningful service with Jews from other parts of the world. It's also about bringing together Jews of all stripes, ethnic groups, and backgrounds into the family we call *Am Yisrael*. And finally, it is about developing new mitzvot of Jewish peoplehood.

Many who reached bar/ Bat mitzvah age during the Soviet Jewry movement recall the empty seats on the bima signifying our twin — our Jew of silence — whose voice we were supposed to carry as our own. What is the modern day analog to that all powerful peoplehood experience from so many childhoods?

Last month my daughter became an Israeli citizen. I asked her, “What is the accompanying ritual?” Surely there must be some way our tradition could help her mark this momentous moment, one that runs throughout our liturgy, a dream of returning to the land of Zion. There was none. Since she is a writer, I urged her to write one. There will be new *olim*, new immigrants, who will follow her and ask the same question.

One of the most famous of the *olim* who is also one of the most recognizable names from the Soviet Jewry movement is Natan Sharansky. Recently, at the wedding of his daughter, Rachel, he said:

This moment takes me back to our wedding, Avital's and mine, 34 years ago in a small Moscow apartment. All we could do was simply repeat every word after the rabbi, while hardly understanding many of them. But when it came to breaking the glass, the rabbi spoke about Jerusalem and we became instantly reconnected to our reality. It was so obvious to us that we were in the very last stages of the thousands of years of struggle to return to Jerusalem.

Obviously, Natan Sharansky understands the concept of peoplehood in deeply personal and Zionist terms.

The definition of peoplehood is no longer the central issue. Today, the overriding issue is finding strategic interventions that will help all Jews understand that we are part of *Am Yisrael*. If Jews can appreciate the connection to history and destiny, fate and fortune, the next chapter in our story will be as meaningful and full of possibilities as the moment a groom steps on the glass under the chuppah.

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# Towards Jewish Peoplehood

Dr. David Mittelberg

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**R**ecent studies sponsored by the American Jewish Committee (Ukeles et al., 2006 and Shimoni et al., 2006), indicate that the next generation of American and Israeli youth are increasingly ignorant of, and uneducated about, each other and unaffected by each other, suggesting that the global solidarity of the Jewish people is being steadily undermined. Indeed, both in America and in Israel, many questions are being asked and conferences being convened, concerning the question what exactly is this Jewish Peoplehood, what needs does it meet, what respect does it command and what commitment does it inspire and compel?

Institutionalized Jewish religion increasingly appears to serve as a force of division between different groups of Jews within Israel and America and between Israel and American Jewry. The question to be reviewed here, therefore, is whether there may in fact be a common basis of Jewish belonging that transcends these differences. Finally, can this purported Jewish Peoplehood be grounded in contemporary developments of the modern, global world that young Israeli and American Jews share with their Jewish and non-Jewish peers everywhere?

Jewishness has historically been more complex than religion, culture or ethnicity alone. Following Schermerhorn, Fishman (2004) views Jews as most similar to an ethnic group understood as "a collectivity within a larger society having real or putative common ancestry, memories of a shared historical past, and a cultural focus on one or more symbolic elements defined as the epitome of their peoplehood" (Fishman 2004;163, Schermerhorn cited by Sollors:1996;xii). Recently Fishman succinctly defined "*peoplehood* as an ethnic group sharing a common descent, language, culture and homeland" Fishman (2007:44). Indeed it is the range of combinations of ethnicity, culture and religion which constitute the symbolic framework of Jewish Peoplehood. They become compelling constructs of individual life however, through the engagement of Jews with each other, through value-driven reciprocal social networks, generating the individual and group resource of ethnic-social capital.

Fishman acknowledges that the retention of a sense of Jewish Peoplehood in contemporary America is complex due to the well-documented and understandably widespread acceptance and allegiance to the "American homeland". However, Fishman goes on to say that..."even in America Jews across the spectrum have a lingering sense that their destiny is linked...to the destiny of Jewish people around the world."(ibid:164). Indeed data to be presented below based on analysis of the NJPS2000 study, support precisely this contention.

Modernity has pluralized social life and made group allegiance and ethnic membership a matter of individual choice. This includes of course the choice to belong to the Jewish people. Fishman indicates that the contexts and dimensions on which that choice is conceived and made varies across the religious- secular and Israel-diaspora divides that express the diversity of global Jewish life. What we can understand from this analysis, is the dynamic nature of cultural reinterpretation that each generation makes of its heritage and its cultural horizons. In regard to these horizons, Fishman suggests an agenda for those seeking to sustain American Jewishness. The renaissance of Jewish life so vibrant in an important minority of American Jews, needs to be linked to the less affected vast majority of American Jews. This may be attained by developing enhanced social networks, opportunities for informal and experiential youth and adult education as well as the structured experience of Jewish Peoplehood through engagement with other Jewish communities in Israel and worldwide.

It will be argued here that Jewish Peoplehood may be conceived as that dimension of Jewishness that 'thickens' the lines of engagement between Jews that *cross* the religious-secular and Israel- Diaspora divides. In this regard Jewish Peoplehood cannot be reduced to any of the four constituents of these two antinomies.

### **Globalization and Ethnicity**

Giddens (1991) points to a mode of social organization that separates time and space without the "situatedness of place". Put another way, this refers to the integration of people in "lived time"—not only in their presence but often, typically, in their absence (Featherstone 1995). More specifically, Featherstone views globalization as:

producing a unified and integrated common culture...(where) ...we find the most striking examples of the effects of time-space compression, as new means of communication effectively make possible simultaneous transactions which sustain 'deterritorialized cultures'. (Featherstone 1995, p. 114–115).

If the genesis and persistence of ethnicity has been traditionally understood as a residual outcome of migrant national ancestry and religious affiliation, the *dissipation of ethnicity* was then anticipated as a function of both generation-time and modernizing secularization. In contrast to this thesis of linear attrition, globalization presents an unanticipated contemporary macro genetic force which generates the invention or reinvention of ethnicity as a response to those very same global forces of cultural homogenization, social meaning, deconstruction and the atomization of social relationships (Mittelberg, 1999).

In this world, identity is privatized—an outcome of personal choice. Indeed, the preservation of this personal choice has itself become the meta-value of postmodern society. That is to say, in the emerging post-modern North America, what matters most is the fact that you can choose which ethnicity to assume as well as the timing, intensity and salience at any given time throughout the life cycle. Hence, the contemporary world becomes one in which the ethnic is not disappearing, rather one where post-moderns typically live through personal multiple identities in a pluralized world (Mittelberg, 1999).

Thomas Friedman (2000, 2006) has translated this process into common English and provided us with a powerful metaphor of a *Flat World* through which to view the process of globalization and the world within which we live. Thus, globalization is the “integration of markets, nation-states and technologies... enabling individuals, corporations, and nation-states to reach around the world farther, faster, deeper and cheaper than ever before.” (Friedman,2000:9). Friedman goes on to argue, that this process “flattens” the world so that anyone worldwide can collaborate and compete. There are ten major flatteners:

- (1) Fall of the Berlin Wall;
- (2) Ability of the general public to access and browse the internet;
- (3) Software that is globally compatible;
- (4) Open sourcing – programs that anyone can use or alter for free;
- (5) Outsourcing – hiring another company to do a specific operational task ;
- (6 )Offshoring – moving an entire operation to a country with cheaper costs;
- (7) Cross-company collaboration to create the most efficient

supply chains; (8) Insourcing – hiring third parties to manage some specific in-house task; (9) In-forming – Searching the internet; (10) New technologies supercharging the other flatteners including wireless, VoIP, etc. (Friedman 2006:50-200)

This new, “flattened” world emphasizes horizontal interactions, non-hierarchical relationships and networks. Yet in current Jewish institutions, particularly those with national or global responsibilities that could perhaps serve as the scaffold of Jewish Peoplehood, we find quite the opposite.

### **The Flat World and the Question of Jewish Institutions**

Jews are on the “have” side of the digital divide (Dror, Y. et al. JPPPI, 2006) and are therefore in a uniquely positioned to make use of the advantages presented by these "flatteners". The current online presence of the Jewish community conforms to the non-hierarchical, bottom-up structure described by Friedman: there is no official website for the Jewish people, rather, there are many websites for different organizations (and the majority of organizations do have an online presence.) (Dror, Y. et al. JPPPI, 2006)

Thus global economy and society is restructuring neither uni-dimensionally nor uni-directionally, rather through multiple contradictions and towards multiple modernities. *What is clear is that yesterday's institutions cannot continue to serve tomorrow's collectivities.* This is true in the business world and it is no less true in the world of community and society. The future of the Jewish people is not to be measured only retrospectively by yesterday's opportunities and challenges but rather it must also address current challenges amid new and hitherto unseen opportunities that the old institutions may unwittingly disguise.

### **Questions to be asked:**

- Can we see Jewish Peoplehood as a de-territorialized culture in the existential sense? Can it be not limited to only one territory?
- Can we discuss this possibility without being accused of denying the centrality of Israel in Jewish history and contemporary Jewish Peoplehood?
- Can we discuss being Jewish without having to see the Diaspora as a liminal event, liminal to primordial Jewishness which can only be found in Israel?

- Are we obliged by the recognition of multilateral Jewish Peoplehood to deny the messianic vision and the Zionist program of the ingathering of the Jewish people in its own land?
- Can there be perhaps an affirmation of the role of Israel in the structure of global Jewish Peoplehood, as well as it being an agent for and dimension of personal Diaspora Jewish identity?
- Can Israeli Jews include Diaspora Jewish life worlds into their collective vision without making the demands of immediate physical residence in the land?
- Finally, can we leave the issue of personal permanent migration to the forces of biography, marriage and money markets and concentrate on the global platform on which Jewish identity and social structure needs to be firmly placed in the twenty first century?

### **On the Absence of Presence of Jewish Peoplehood**

What can be detected in these data and what is absent? On the one hand a large cross section of American Jews and Israelis recognize their subjective belonging to a collectivity beyond their local and national domicile. This belonging is not exhausted by religion or political allegiance but is waning with generation. Only extraordinary interventions successfully sustain this allegiance across generation and age barriers. It is primarily the Israel experience of diaspora Jews and also I believe, increasingly the positive encounter of Israeli Jewry with diaspora Jewry and its pluralistic Judaism.

When I say extraordinary interventions, I stress *extraordinary*, since the ordinary institutions of everyday Jewish life have a hard enough task mobilizing young American Jews to local affiliation with Jewish life. Is it then reasonable or conceivable to expect that these same institutions can generate and then sustain affiliation with transnational expressions of Jewish education? The answer is clearly *no*. Contemporary Jewish institutions need to be restructured both to engage deeply the constituency it is supposed to serve and not just the elites who do the serving, but also to engage these constituencies with their transnational peers. Clearly the forest of vertical hierarchical Jewish institutions that have been termed by Jack Wertheimer (2005), insightfully as *silos*, have perhaps strong foundations but they do not cast a giant shadow.



## **What is to be done?**

### (I). Change the existential basis of Jewish Peoplehood:

- Enrich individual Jewish identity within the multiple identities of modernity.
- Enhance Jewish social capital within local community networks.
- Develop transnational Jewish global community networks, generating lateral Jewish Solidarity and Peoplehood.

### (II) Change the *paradigm* of Global Jewish Peoplehood:

- Affirm both the Homeland, the core Jewish State and the Diasporas at the expense of neither.
- Recognize the multiple creative sources of Jewish culture irrespective of their links to territory.
- Promote multiple opportunities for travel, encounter and socio cultural engagement between Jewish communities in Israel and the Diaspora, based on principle of reciprocal hospitality and mutual responsibility.
- Promote demographic stamina through social mobility and migration driven by models of Jewish collective survival.

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# Making Peoplehood Work: The Institutional Challenge

Dr. Shlomi Ravid

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Most people mistakenly view Peoplehood as a global, amorphous and abstract concept that presents an optional ideological approach towards the Jewish collective. The truth, however, couldn't be farther from this interpretation. In reality, Peoplehood provides the basic rationale for the whole Jewish communal system. If it were not for the need and desire to do things with and for other Jews, how could one explain and justify Jewish Federations, JCCs, Hillels, Jewish summer camps, not to mention Jewishly focused political, philanthropic and advocacy organizations. My claim is that the notion of Peoplehood constitutes the communal and institutional framework of Jewish civilization. Making Peoplehood work is a challenge for local, national and global Jewish institutions.

The argument does not stop with the general communal institutions. Jewish congregations and schools too, while perhaps not stating Peoplehood as goal, actually operate according to this model. On the surface, the role of congregations is simply to provide religious services while schools are dedicated to teaching Judaism. However, a simple analysis of their mode of operation, structure and array of services provided reveals a significant focus on building and sustaining Jewish community and Peoplehood.

The problem with the above misconception is that the lack of understanding as to the rationale and true nature of institutions often leads to confusion in goal setting and policy making. If a JCC is seen as primarily a provider of social and communal services and loses sight of its role and place in the larger Jewish scheme of things, its ability to serve that cause will be impacted. This will obviously be the case for a Federation which sees itself as solely a fund raising and allocating agency for the local community, or a school that would claim that its role is limited to providing knowledge. My claim is that in order to be true to their cause and also function effectively, Jewish institutions need to redefine themselves as creators of Jewish nodes and cells which together form Jewish society and civilization.

When we refer to Jewish Peoplehood we usually point to the larger global context. As this broad concept, however, actually defines our institutions, we need to understand how Peoplehood concretely plays out in their lives and is expressed by them. By the same token

we need to see what they contribute to sustaining and enhancing this core Jewish value. In other words, we need to explore what it means to be an institutional expression of Jewish Peoplehood in the 21st century and how it should shape and impact the future mission of Jewish institutions. If part of the mandate of JCCs, Federations and Jewish schools is to engage their members with the Jewish People, how is that challenge to be addressed?

What is required here is first and foremost recognition by the Jewish communal leadership of the Peoplehood dimension of their work. It is far from being understood. In practical terms, strategies of leadership education need to be employed, backed by the development of Peoplehood educational materials. This is not an impossible challenge but it requires global mobilization of resources. Not so much because of the amount of resources required but more because the next chapter of Jewish Peoplehood will be written by the whole Jewish collective based on the conviction that this is indeed the agenda of our day. It cannot be done by the Israelis alone. It cannot be done by world Jewry alone. Rejuvenating the Jewish collective is a global Jewish challenge that can be addressed only by the whole people.

There is no need to recreate the wheel. Jews have been extremely effective in sustaining for over 2,000 years a sense of joint responsibility towards their people and its members. While the current reality seems very different than any prior time in Jewish history, part of the Jewish legacy is that of adapting to changing circumstances. Relying on education as a primary tool for sustaining Jewish civilization, but adapting both content and pedagogy to fit the current challenges, should provide the strategic road map.

The challenge of creating a sense of Jewish solidarity in the 21st century where the prevalent paradigm is that of free choice is not simple. In a way, it is part of the larger question of why being Jewish is significant and important in this day and age. However, while most of our focus and resources have been invested in strengthening Jewish identity, the dimension of belonging to a people (also known as Peoplehood) has been neglected. If my assumption that Peoplehood provides the rationale for the Jewish institutional system is correct, then those institutions are bound to be impacted by its weakening. If Jewish institutions want to flourish and thrive, strengthening Jewish Peoplehood must become a priority for them.

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# Israeli-Jewish Diaspora Relations

Professor Gabriel Sheffer

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Israel and the Jewish Diaspora are both experiencing major transformations which influence their relations. These include demographic changes: shifts in the centers of the Jewish diasporic communities, the creation of new communities and the reemergence of communities especially in East Europe; improvement of the political, social and economic positions of Diaspora Jews, but at the same time an increase in anti-Semitism and enmity in certain states, the emergence of new cultural, social, political and economic forces in Israel that strongly impact the Israeli society and, consequently, its relations with the Diaspora. It should be added that all these changes occur against the background of globalization, individualization and substantial use of sophisticated communication systems.

These changes and their implications for Israeli-Diaspora relations are discussed in my and Hadas Roth's new book – *Who leads? Israeli-Diaspora relations*.<sup>1</sup> This book is the first of its kind. It presents both an overview and detailed discussions about the most important issues facing Israel and its relations with the Diaspora. It is based on original written sources, publications, interviews with senior politicians and on the expanding theoretical and analytical literature about the general diasporic phenomenon all over the world. From this latter viewpoint, the assumption is that the Jewish Diaspora and its relations with Israel is not unique and that important lessons can be learned from what is happening in other diasporas and their relations with their homelands.

But most importantly, the book is the first to focus on the Israeli side in this sphere. Thus it deals with the ideology, positions, attitudes, policies and behavior of the Israeli public, Israeli senior politicians and bureaucrats, and the media and various non-governmental organizations active in this sphere. The following analysis is based on the findings of the book.

There are various problem areas facing the entire Jewish People, including Israel: a. the urgent need for the reformulation and then the maintenance of the Jewish identity; b. the

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<sup>1</sup> Gabriel (Gabi) Sheffer and Hadas Roth-Toledano, *Who leads? Israeli-Diaspora Relations*, Tel Aviv: Hakibutz Hameuhad, 2007 (Hebrew)

need for defining the delicate issues of center and periphery in the nation, the loyalties of Israel and of the Diaspora toward Israel, on the one hand, and the loyalties of Diaspora Jews toward their hostlands, on the other, and above all, the need to ensure continuous close connections among all Jews; c. the need to develop and expand Jewish-Israeli education in both Israel and the Diaspora; d. Jewish immigration to Israel and to other hostlands; e. the Israelis' attitudes and policies toward prosperous, reemerging and declining Jewish communities; e. the struggle against anti-Semitism; f. the reparations issue; g. the influence of the media on Israeli-Diaspora relations; h. the urgent need for far-reaching reforms in the Israeli organizations and institutions dealing with the Jewish Diaspora.

Before elaborating on these problematic issues, it should be said that not all is in bad shape in this sphere. Generally speaking, Israel and Israelis care especially for Diaspora Jews in despair, they are ready to extend help to Jewish communities facing difficulties, and for the first time there is some increase in the allocation of resources for these purposes. On the other side of the nation, Diaspora Jews are showing interest in what is happening in Israel, they are donating money to help Israel and Israelis, and they lobby on behalf of Israel in their host countries, etc.

Yet, as mentioned above, it is pretty well known there are also basic matters that should be reshaped in order to ensure the continuous close relations between the two parts of world Jewry. As far as the Israeli side is concerned, when focusing on each of these highly problematic issues (and because of space limitations here only the more significant issues will be discussed) it turns out that situation is as follows:

- Most Israelis lack deep knowledge, proper acquaintance and current information of the situation of the Diaspora. This is particularly the situation among younger Israelis. Even those Israelis who have traveled abroad and visited diasporic communities know very little about the general situation of world Jewry or the specific situation in the communities they have visited. Even worse, most of them are not interested in the Diaspora. This is not surprising since the Israeli school system, the press and the media do not invest much in teaching and reporting about the Diaspora's situation. Consequently there is almost no public discussion and debate about Israeli attitude, position and policies concerning the Diaspora.

- A close examination of the positions of the majority of the Israeli public, the main parties, the government and the Israeli organizations dealing with the Diaspora shows that a traditional, but archaic, Israeli-centric ideology and attitude is held by the vast majority. These views that strongly influence the actual policies and actions of the Israeli governments and organizations are far from fitting the current situation of the Diaspora and its relations with Israel. These ideology and attitudes have not been re-examined or even discussed here
- There is a lack of formative leadership that is willing and capable of overcoming the inertia in Israeli formal and informal positions in a way that might lead to new attitudes and policies which will be more suitable to the Diaspora's current situation and will lead to the needed changed relations between the two parts of the Jewish nation. The problem is that the actual activities in this sphere are determined by political, organizational and personal self-interests of the persons dealing with these issues.
- Most of the statements made by the few Israeli politicians and bureaucrats who deal with Israeli-Diaspora relations are devoid of serious meaning. Such statements are merely lip-service to the need of close relations between Israel and the Diaspora. These statements also cover up the fact that there is a lot of confusion and lack of action in this respect.
- Despite the statements made by the Israeli "professionals" emphasizing the good performance of the various organizations dealing with the Diaspora and the need for reforms, actually all these organizations and institutes are facing severe difficulties as far as their personnel, financial resources, formal and informal status in Israel and in the Diaspora and their true ability to conduct reasonable relations with the Diaspora and pursue adequate policies.
- There are severe problems in policy formation and implementation in Israel. Policy making is specific, not regular and systematic. Most of the decisions are made not by senior Israeli politicians, but rather by the "professionals" in accordance with their personal and institutional whims. Most of their policies and decisions are dealing with marginal matters and avoiding any major decisions that are urgently needed to improve and buttress Israel-Diaspora relations. In regards to critical issues such as Jewish identity, immigration to Israel, Jewish and Israeli education and requested support for Israel, on

the one hand, and for the Diaspora on the other (especially for communities facing difficulties) there is no clear cooperation between the government and the organizations active in Israel, or even between the various governmental ministries and the various departments in the organizations dealing with Diaspora matters.

- There is problematic cooperation and coordination between the Israeli government and organizations, on the one hand, and the main organizations in the Diaspora, on the other. Successive Israeli governments have not succeeded in creating proper mechanisms for dealing with these discrepancies. This situation is pretty obvious concerning recruitment of donations and other resources for Israel, and the order of priorities in the use of available resources. There are clear gaps in the needs and priorities in this respect.

Then what should and can be changed in this sphere?

First and foremost, there is a need to adopt new patterns, some of which are known, to deepen and widen Israelis' knowledge and understanding of what is currently happening in the Diaspora in order to increase their awareness and solve some of the existing difficulties in the relationship. Thus, the number of classes and their programs in elementary and high schools and courses and seminars in the universities and colleges in Israel should be significantly expanded. The Israeli media should be encouraged to expand its continuous coverage of what is happening in the Diaspora. In this context, the Israeli organizations should change their current position, and support research and development of non-conventional approaches to these issues, including the study of the vast literature on the general diasporic phenomenon, which can shed new light on various questions facing Israel and the Diaspora.

Despite the widespread skepticism concerning the significance of ideologies that are expressed in the parties' platforms and in the Israeli government's publications and announcements about its basic policies, there is a need to reformulate them. Most important is the need to critically reexamine the Israel-centric basic approach of most Israelis and institutions. This is not a new position. It goes back to the pre-state period and further developed by the founding fathers of Israel and especially by Ben-Gurion. If there is a true belief and wish for a unity in World Jewry this position must be altered. It does not mean that all Jews abroad should be granted the right to vote in Israeli elections, as some



observers have suggested, but that when basic policies are made the needs of the Diaspora should be equally considered.

In this connection, there is an urgent need to deal with the redefinition and consolidation of Jewish identity – what is known as the highly contested question of "who is a Jew"? In this context it should be noted that there are increasing doubts especially about the widely accepted notion of the religious nature of Judaism. An increasing number of Jews in the Diaspora and in Israel think about it in terms of ethnic-national-religious identity.

Such a reexamination of the Jewish identity should include the issue of center and periphery in the Jewish nation. It has been noted that Israel's centrality in the nation is seriously questioned by many in the Diaspora, especially younger persons who have been fully integrated in their hostlands. In order to avoid the estrangement of such Jews the implications of these growing positions among them should be seriously considered, and the new clear understanding should be widely communicated to the Jews in the Diaspora.

Consequently, there will be a necessity to reorganize the structure of organizations like the Jewish Agency, or even establish totally new organizations on an equal basis between Israel and the Diaspora as far as representation, control and management are concerned. It will mean greater involvement of the Israeli government and representative organizations in the Diaspora.

Without a clear Israeli acknowledgment of the current contested and problematic issues in Israel's relations with the Diaspora and readiness to invest unconventional thinking and action in their change, there is a clear possibility of additional deterioration in Israeli-Diaspora relations. Despite their personal and organizational limitations, the senior Israeli politicians should undertake the rethinking and reorganization in this critical sphere for Israel and the Jewish Diaspora.

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# **Building Community and Peoplehood**

## **In a Time of Personalism**

Dr. Jonathan Woocher

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**T**he topic I've been asked to address is one that is on many of our minds today. In this group, I don't need to elaborate on the challenge we face: There are multiple signs that the commitment to Jewish community and peoplehood as we have understood these terms is eroding, especially among younger Jews. We're not alone in facing this situation. The developments we see are part of larger trends in American society. But, these trends are especially problematic for us as Jews, both because of the central role that community and peoplehood play in our heritage, and because, as a small minority, we rely to a considerable extent on our solidarity to preserve our vitality.

The key question at this stage is not how we got here – we can debate the details, but the general story is well known. It is how do we respond – can the commitment to community and peoplehood be strengthened and, if so, how?

I want to say at the outset that I believe there are no easy or obvious answers, including the suggestions I shall offer. We will need a spirit of openness and experimentation as we test out approaches and look to see their impact.

One important point is worth noting: The challenge to community and peoplehood comes from two directions, though the two are not unrelated. On the one hand, we see an accentuation of individualism, personalism, and choice as dominant features in our society and culture. This thrust, epitomized in what has been called the “sovereign self,” undermines all a priori loyalties, and especially loyalty to collectives that are perceived as seeking to impose limits on personal freedom or as setting standards for behavior that contravene the ultimate decision-making power of the individual. On the other hand, we also witness today, especially among young people, a heightened commitment to globalism, multi-culturalism,

and universalism. This commitment renders what might be seen as particularistic loyalties – e.g., loyalty to a specific ethnic group or nation – as morally problematic. Why should we single out members of one community or one people for special concern when so many need so much?

Efforts to connect Jews strongly to the Jewish community and to the Jewish people, including the State of Israel, must contend with both of these challenges. We must be perceived neither as too demanding nor too parochial. We must make the case that attachment to this community and this people is something that should be chosen, not something that is expected or assumed.

So, what can we do as a practical matter?

I want to borrow a concept and a strategy from my colleague and teacher Shlomi Ravid, who now directs the International School for Jewish Peoplehood Studies at Beth Hatefutsoth: we need to invest in building Jewish social, communal, and peoplehood capital. The concept of social capital, popularized by Robert Putnam in his influential work, *Bowling Alone*, recognizes that underlying the formal structures and institutions of society lies a sub-structure of relationships and dispositions that are necessary to sustain these institutions. These critical dispositions include trust, mutual respect, and norms of reciprocity that both motivate participation in social institutions and that “lubricate” their ongoing operations. Without social capital, institutions eventually go bankrupt and collapse. People won’t participate, and when they do, they do so without enthusiasm and deep loyalty.

This line of argument suggests, therefore, that in order to strengthen the Jewish institutions that comprise the Jewish community and that give concrete form to the concept of Jewish peoplehood, we must strengthen the direct connections and concrete relationships among individual Jews. These relationships build the trust, concern, commitment, and sense of mutual responsibility – and also the joys of comradeship and familiarity – that give substance and spirit to and thereby sustain institutional life.

Focusing on building communal and peoplehood capital means, in a sense, adopting the advertising slogan of RBS (Royal Bank of Scotland), “less talk, more action.” I’m not

suggesting that we give up entirely trying to clarify what we mean by Jewish peoplehood or community, or making the case verbally for why these concepts are valid and important. But, I am suggesting that this discussion is not our top priority today, nor that we need to agree on what we mean by the terms as a pre-requisite for “doing community and peoplehood.”

What would such an approach focused on building Jewish peoplehood and social capital mean in concrete terms? Let me suggest three implications.

The first, and most obvious, is that we need to invest much more in creating and encouraging participation in experiences that build social, communal, and peoplehood capital. Birthright Israel is a prime example of how this can be done and the impact it can have. The evaluation studies that have been undertaken indicate that the power of Birthright Israel emanates from several sources: the free gift of the trip, the carefully crafted educational program, Israel itself, and, not least, the experience of being with other Jews in both small and large groups (sometimes more Jews in one place than participants have ever experienced before) for a concentrated period of time. This includes Jews from Israel and from other diaspora communities – a palpable encounter with the reality of global peoplehood.

The impact of Birthright Israel, not on every participant, but on many, and of other programs that bring Jews together in creative and purposeful ways, highlights the need to create many more such opportunities. When Jews come into contact with other Jews in contexts that encourage serious relationships to develop, the reality of peoplehood is created, regardless of the rhetoric that is used. Feelings of connection, mutual responsibility, and shared destiny do not develop in the abstract, nor from slogans. They grow out of real experiences. We have the know-how and the financial capacity to create many such experiences for youth, for young adults, and for families. The relative ease of travel and the revolution in technology make forging such concrete connections more feasible than ever before. But, connections can be built on much smaller scales as well. How much might it mean to a young family, perhaps one just starting out on its Jewish journey thanks to a program like PJ Library, to be connected to other young families at a similar stage in their lives and in their Jewish

development? We have manifold opportunities to build community and peoplehood capital. We simply need to seize them.

Second, a focus on social and peoplehood capital suggests that we must not confuse the current institutional forms of community and peoplehood with their essential content. I believe that the fundamentals of human motivation do not change. People still seek connectedness to one another and to something larger than themselves, just as they seek meaning and mastery over their own lives. And, people can still be inspired to take action and to devote themselves to ends beyond their own pleasure when they experience this connectedness. Too often for too many, however, our current Jewish institutions don't provide this kind of connection and inspiration – these institutions are not building social capital, at least for a significant portion of our younger Jews.

This means that we need to be ready to change forms that no longer work so well (this is happening with synagogue renewal efforts) and to be open to new forms of community that are emerging. This General Assembly is highlighting the work of many of the new Jewish social entrepreneurs and social networkers who are creating new institutions and new forms of connection. They are building new Jewish social capital, often in unconventional and even controversial ways – via bike rides and blogs, independent minyanim and edgy magazines, concerts and journeys to impoverished communities half way across the globe. Will they join synagogues and JCCs, and give to federation? We don't know yet. But by supporting them in their endeavors, we may well do more to advance Jewish community and peoplehood for their generation than our established institutions could ever do by themselves.

Third, we do need to confront squarely the challenge not only of personalism, but of universalism, and to do so not just in rhetoric, but in action. To me, this means re-positioning Jewish community and peoplehood not as parochial, limiting categories, but as platforms for an activist engagement with the world that advances human freedom and dignity. I believe that over the last few decades, in both our language and our behavior, we have too often projected a defensive and self-protective communalism – one focused on survival and “continuity,” even at times an “us vs. them” mentality. Putnam argues for the

importance of balancing what he calls “bonding” and “bridging” social capital – connections within a tight group and connections beyond that group. As Rabbi Sid Schwarz has pointed out in his excellent book, *Judaism and Justice*, there is certainly a basis for emphasizing the importance of group integrity and self-preservation – what he calls the “Exodus impulse” – in our history and tradition, not to mention in a world in which threats to Jewish survival remain all too real. Nonetheless, I suggest that in today’s world, and especially for younger Jews, we need to put greater emphasis on the other thrust in our tradition (what Rabbi Schwarz calls the “Sinai impulse”) that sees our identity as Jews as a “calling” directed to each of us individually and to all of us collectively to bring righteousness and justice into the world.

By being visibly engaged in building bridging social capital we will also, I believe, strengthen bonding social capital. When young people see a Jewish community, a Jewish people, and a Jewish state that manifest this commitment, whether by leading the struggle to stop genocide in Darfur and to resettle the victims or by fighting on behalf of the poor and immigrants – Jewish and non-Jewish – here in North America or in Israel, the value and validity of affirming a collective identity as Jews become clearer.

This is the time of year when we are reading the book of Genesis. It tells a striking story that connects how we became and who we are as a people to nothing less than the redemption of creation. Recall the story: God creates a world that is good, indeed “very good,” a world where humans are intended to live a paradisaal existence. This is not to be, however, as we humans prove ourselves all too prone to egoism, avoidance of responsibility, and violence. God tries again, wiping out all of humanity except for one family. But, even with a second chance, humans prove arrogant and unruly. So, God acts again, dividing humans into diverse peoples and tongues. Less room for conspiracy, perhaps, but no closer to living out the vision of harmony that is the intent of creation. And here enters the Jewish people, quietly at first, in a single couple that must leave their home and start fresh in an unfamiliar land, comforted only by a promise: “I will make of you a great nation, and through you will all the families of the earth be blessed.”

This is the Biblical myth. Universal redemption is the goal. Forging a people that is truly dedicated to justice and righteousness is the way. Throughout the book of Genesis, Abraham, Sarah and their descendents learn what it is and what it requires to be a people of integrity, compassion, forgiveness, and peace. Then comes the greatest lesson of all: the experience of being slaves. We know how we should treat others, the Torah repeatedly enjoins, because we were strangers in the land of Egypt. At Sinai, we learn what God means by a “great nation” – a “holy nation, a kingdom of priests,” striving – and usually failing, we must be candid – to serve as a light to the nations, a model, an exemplar, and thereby hasten the day when creation’s harmony will be restored.

I believe in this story – not literally, perhaps, but as a story that helps make my own personal story, the one I am writing with my life, more meaningful and more rewarding. This story gives me an identity and a purpose, and it also suggests where I can find at least some of those who will write the next chapters of the story with me – among my community and my people. I realize that others will read and write this story somewhat differently than I do – but I don’t believe that the story has lost its power, even in a time of personalism. We just need to remember it, to tell it and, above all, to live it, as individuals, as a community, as a people.

So, this is what I propose: Let’s strengthen the human connections from which community and peoplehood are woven through experiences that bring Jews together across all sorts of boundaries. Let’s continue the work of remaking our institutions and of supporting new ones that enable Jews to connect with one another and with larger purposes in their lives. And, let’s live a vision of Jewish community and peoplehood that is not narrow and tribal, but that makes us a springboard for strengthening trust, generosity, and mutual responsibility among all humanity. If we can do this, then I believe that Jewish community and peoplehood will have a bright future indeed, and we will see fulfilled the blessing given to Abraham millennia ago: “I will make of you a great nation...and through you will all the families of the earth be blessed.

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## **United Jewish Communities (UJC)**

United Jewish Communities (UJC) represents 155 Jewish Federations and 400 independent communities across North America. Through the UJA Federation Campaign, UJC provides life-saving and life-enhancing humanitarian assistance to those in need, and translates Jewish values into social action on behalf of millions of Jews in hundreds of communities in North America, in towns and villages throughout Israel, in the former Soviet Union, and 60 countries around the world. Through the Israel Emergency Campaign, UJC and the Jewish Federations of North America are providing economic, social, human welfare and other types of support to Israelis and victims of terror as they strive to lead normal lives during a period of extreme difficulty.

## **The International School for Jewish Peoplehood Studies, Founded by the Nadav Fund, Beth Hatefutsoth**

In 2005 the Israeli Knesset ratified the Beth Hatefutsoth law, which recognizes Beth Hatefutsoth as the national center for the Jewish communities in Israel and abroad. This change of mandate led to the reframing of Beth Hatefutsoth as the World Center for Jewish Peoplehood and to the establishment of the International School for Jewish Peoplehood Studies, supported by the NADAV Fund.

The SFJPS is the only institution in the world solely dedicated to Jewish Peoplehood Studies. The SFJPS is on the cutting edge of this new field of studies, leading the way in developing a fresh and innovative pedagogy of Jewish global connectivity. The SFJPS aspires to create a global platform in which the future language of Jewish Peoplehood will be fostered through dialogue, study and interaction between Israelis and Jews from all over the globe.

## **KolDor**

KolDor is global network of emerging Jewish leaders and activists who are committed to shifting the existing paradigms in the Jewish world, strengthening Jewish Peoplehood, and leading a change in Jewish communities worldwide. Working across geographic, religious, political and organizational affiliations to develop mutual understanding, to build global Jewish Peoplehood, KolDor strives to bring together people and ideas in a neutral setting with the aim of innovating for the Jewish people. With hundreds of network participants hailing from over 20 countries and who are themselves part of more than 150 diverse networks, KolDor is a uniquely flexible, independent and neutral entity that operates with little hierarchy or bureaucracy, which collaborates with grass-roots and established networks and organizations around the world.