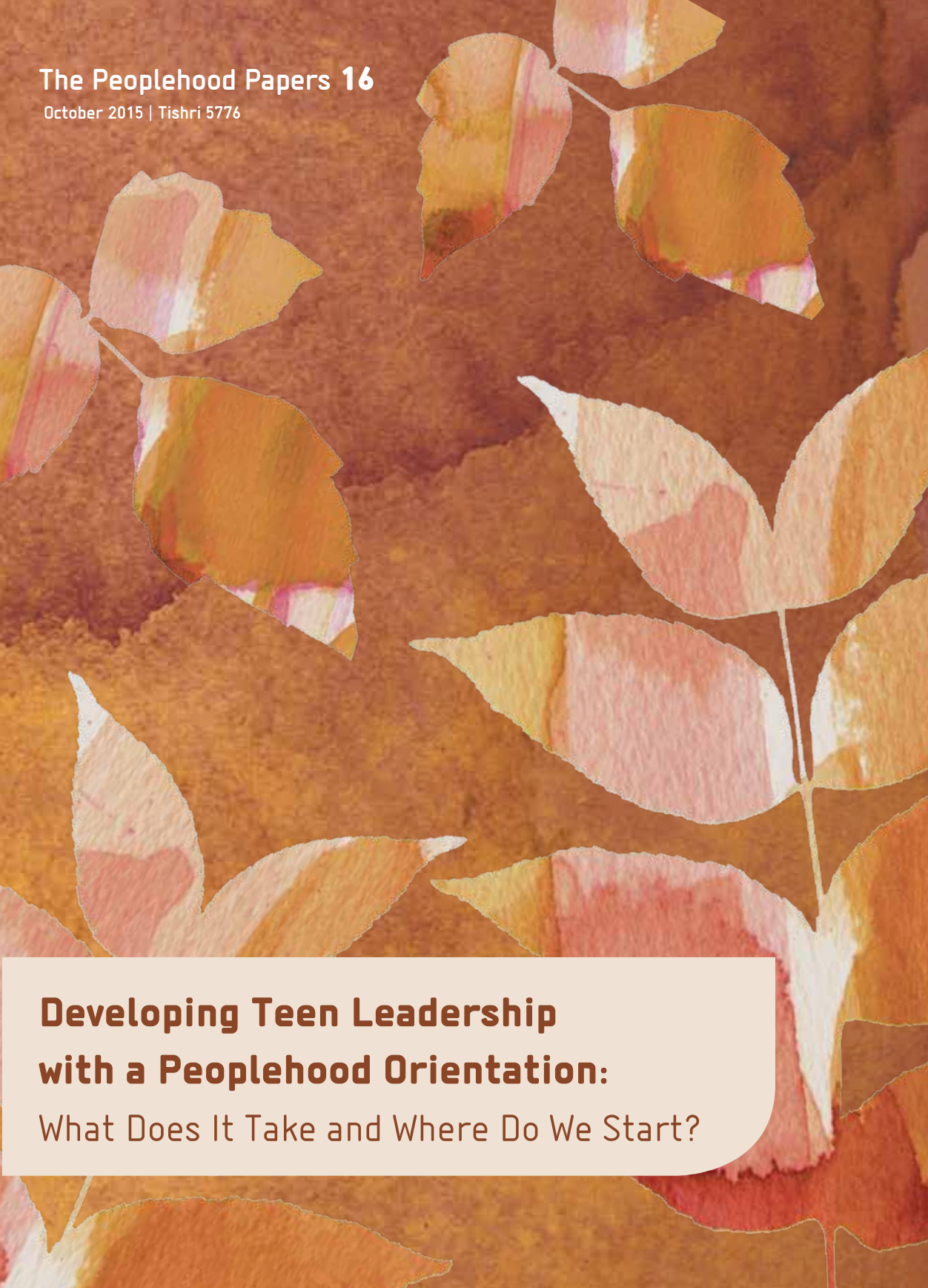


The Peoplehood Papers 16

October 2015 | Tishri 5776



**Developing Teen Leadership
with a Peoplehood Orientation:**
What Does It Take and Where Do We Start?

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Developing Teen Leadership with a Peoplehood Orientation:

What Does It Take
and Where Do We Start?

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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

Past issues can be accessed at www.jpeoplehood.org/library

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

The Diller Teen Fellows program is an international partnership designed to educate, inspire, and empower Jewish teens to be active, effective leaders with a strong Jewish identity, a deep attachment to and investment in their local and the global Jewish community, a commitment to Israel's flourishing and thriving, and an active engagement in personal acts of tikkun olam. Diller Teen Fellows, having just graduated its 18th cohort, engages nearly 600 teens annually in 26 partner communities around the world and currently has over 2,500 alumni.

UJA Federation
of New York



המרכז לחינוך לעמיות יהודית
The Center for Jewish Peoplehood Education



Helen Diller 1929–2015



This edition of the Peoplehood Papers is dedicated to the memory of Helen Diller for her vision, generosity, and persistence in understanding the importance of identifying and supporting emerging Jewish teen leaders.

Helen was prescient in discerning that a key for strengthening Jewish identity in the teen years was to engage and connect teen peers first in North America and Israel, and then globally. She loved the fact that becoming a “Diller Teen” became a worldwide Jewish brand for some of each community’s best and brightest youth from Toronto to Beersheva, San Francisco to Kiryat Shmona.

These future leaders come to be deeply committed to their work together because they have been empowered to create the agenda to do their part to confront, and hopefully help solve, some of the pressing issues of the day.

Helen Diller understood the importance of selecting the highest quality teen professionals who themselves are role models committed to continually improve the quality of the educational curriculum based on input from the other teen professionals, their supervisors, community volunteer leaders, and, of course, the teens themselves.

In 2015 the Diller Teen Initiative is selecting its eighteenth cohort. It is now the largest global Jewish Teen leadership development program in the Jewish world. It has “miles to go before it sleeps” or, as Helen knew, “the day is short, the work is much, it is not our responsibility to finish the work, but we are not free to desist from it either.”

Phyllis Cook is the Philanthropic Consultant of the Helen Diller Family Foundation

From the Editor

Shlomi Ravid

In the period of change and transition that we experience today the role of the leadership in envisioning, planning and building the Jewish collective future is crucial. For that reason we decided to dedicate a series of Peoplehood Papers' issues to the topic of **nurturing Jewish leadership with a Peoplehood orientation – What does it take and where do we start?** We would like to explore the unique challenges of collective leadership development and how we respond to them in practice.

Over the coming year we will explore the topic focusing on Teens, young adults and communal leadership. We will ask professionals, programs' alumni and funders questions such as: How do we assure the integration of the values of Peoplehood into the worldviews of our future leaders? How do we guarantee that our students or fellows embrace both a passion for the Jewish collective enterprise as well as a responsibility for its future? How do we help them understand that their commitment to particular Jewish organizations or projects is an expression of a broader commitment to the Jewish people?

The first issue in the series is dedicated to Teen leadership development. Our natural partner in the development and production of this publication is the Diller Teen Fellows which is a global leader in Peoplehood oriented Teen leadership development. On a personal note I have to add that the fact that I had the privilege of developing that program 18 years ago with the Helen Diller Family Foundation and stayed involved since, makes this publication very special for me. Not every day do you get to combine two professional passions in one project.

We decided to dedicate this issue to the memory of Helen Diller z"l who passed away this year. Helen was a pioneer in Teen leadership development and her great contribution will live through the flourishing of the field.

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Introduction

Liat Cohen-Raviv and Adam Weisberg

In the following pages our selected contributors dig into and tease out a variety of issues critical to interpreting, unpacking, understanding, and responding to just how teens, leadership, and peoplehood go together. More than that, they provide insight into how we can most meaningfully and authentically engage teens in an exploration of where and how Jewish life and community becomes meaningful for them and how they want to contribute to its flourishing.

For all of us at Diller Teen Fellows program, this conversation goes to the root of our mission and the essence of our work. Our success is predicated on our willingness to meet teens where they are at, and to accompany them on their journey to meaningful Jewish engagement and leadership. We are excited to learn from our contributors' perspectives, and to thinking more about how we can inspire teen commitment to Jewish Peoplehood in action.

Several of our authors, including Arie Levy, David Bryfman, and Ginette Searle remind us not to take for granted teens' embrace of existing conceptions of peoplehood, or of the value and importance of Jewish engagement at all. They make clear that the historical and social context in which teens are coming of age, coming into their own, and coming to understand Judaism, Jewishness, and Jewish community, are unique and, if not uncharted, then at least being regularly charted anew. They don't bemoan this reality, but they remind us to be attentive to it.

Deborah Meyers, crystalizes this critical point when she reminds us, "Unless we help teens understand what it takes to build and participate as members of a Jewish community, and unless we give teens a reason to belong, will there be robust communities for these leaders to lead?" Josh Miller reinforces this insight when he reminds us, "Having a meaningful influence on teens in any context starts by taking a genuine interest in what matters most to them." Our first and foremost agenda has to be meeting Jewish teens where *they* are, and only then attempting to provide them with meaningful experiences and reasons to identify with and invest their time and energy in exploring and embracing Jewish community.

Josh Miller and David Rittberg focus on a salient point other contributors also note that Jewish teens today are actively looking for answers to several core questions. The questions, as enumerated by Simon Klarfeld include, “Who am I? What is my purpose? Where do I fit in?” Simon goes on to remind us that, “These are fundamental questions for teens as they transition from childhood to adulthood. And these, particularly the third, are questions that the concept of Peoplehood addresses.”

So we are confronted with a question, not a new one, but a critical one for our times and our work: how do we meaningfully engage teens in the work and world of Jewish peoplehood. While the range of answers may be vast, the authors of two of our articles give us a good starting place. Max Rochman and Aliza Caplan give us a window into the moment in which their sense of Jewish Peoplehood first emerged. Leah Maas and Keren Dicastro point out in their article that while they were encouraged as teens to believe they were part of something bigger than themselves, they were also, “both... given the space to take these feelings, to question and wrestle with them, and were then empowered to do something with them! Each of us, in our own homes, in our own time, was given the platforms to explore how these feelings affected and inspired us.” This perspective is echoed by nearly all our authors, and is given particular attention by Rebecca Voorwinde and Michael Zion. They remind us that ultimately our role is to expose young Jews to compelling and challenging ideas about the Jewish past, present, and future – about Jewish flourishing – and then giving them space to wrestle with these ideas and their meaning.

Ezra Kopelowitz, who has done significant research on the topic of Jewish teen leadership and Peoplehood sums up our goal, our grail, succinctly when he asks himself and us, “How do we make sure that Jewish teens embrace both a passion for the Jewish collective enterprise as well as a responsibility for its future?” While there may not be a singular answer to Ezra’s question, the essays that follow provide a well-articulated launch point for our continued search and refinement of our questions.

Liat Cohen Raviv is the Diller Teen Fellows Senior Director and Adam Weisberg is the Diller Teen Initiatives Director



Like It or Hate It – Generation Me is Here to Stay!

David Bryfman

Taken straight from the headlines:

Website Offers Virtual Seder¹

Dancing Bar Mitzvah Boy Donated his \$36,000 gift money to Charity²

Virtual Judaism: Finding Second Life in Online Community³

Should Auschwitz be a Site for Selfies?⁴

When you read these headlines are you confused? Concerned? Angered? Or are you Curious? Hopeful? Inspired? If you were one of those people who read these and came away shaking your head in disdain, wondering where our young people's values have gone, or imagining your deceased relatives rolling in their graves, then I have a headline for you - Like it or Hate it – Generation Me is here to Stay!

Many have declared that today's generation of teenagers and young adults (somewhere between Generation Y and Millennials) are the most narcissistic, self-indulgent and selfish generation to ever walk the planet – hence the title Generation Me. Given this description it's no wonder that our Jewish youth, who in most ways resemble their non-Jewish counterparts, are spending thousands of hours online pretending to be someone else, dancing on YouTube, and yes, even taking photos of themselves smiling in front of death camps.

But on the other hand there is ample evidence that shows that youth today, including, an often overly represented Jewish population, are the most politically active, socially conscious and positive action-oriented the world has ever seen. Those children of the sixties who want to claim this title often say that you can't compare an online petition to

1 <http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-3867859,00.html>

2 <http://www.haaretz.com/jewish-world/jewish-world-news/.premium-1.541831>

3 <http://presentense.org/magazine/virtual-judaism-finding-second-life-in-online-community>

4 <http://www.newyorker.com/culture/culture-desk/should-auschwitz-be-a-site-for-selfies>

a protest rally – and they may be right. But the point here is not to claim one generation's superiority over another, but to remind ourselves that today's youth are capable of being both narcissists and altruists – and often at the same time.

It is essential for us not to dismiss their humanitarianism as a by-product of their access to technology. Yes it is the case that Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Snapchat open up access to literally millions of people quicker and faster than any technology we have seen before. But it is also a mistake to posit that the desire of our teens to make the world a better place is because of this technology. Quite simply if they chose to spend their time doing other things they could, and they would, and they do.

For our Jewish teens there is an additional element that plays into what may have first appear to feed into our initial dichotomous understanding of the narcissistic self and the collectively minded individual. Jewish teens by and large⁵ feel very much integrated into the western societies in which they live. In most ways they look like, behave like, and have the same values as their non-Jewish counterparts. Simultaneously these Jewish youth are also proud members of the Jewish tribe. Jewish teens often feel a strong sense of belonging to their fellow Jews, much as other teens in America have their own affinity groups – whether it be by religion, ethnicity, race, gender or sexual-orientation. Newer conceptions of identity understand that these teens can have multiple identities, hybrids of these identities and fluidly move between these identities. A Jewish teen can be as American as they want to be and as Jewish as they want to be, at the same time or at different times, depending on the context that they find themselves in.

5 By and large, the understanding of Jewish teens in this way refers to non-Orthodox Jewish teens, who constitute the vast majority of Jewish teens in the world today.

And the really good news for the Jewish people is that Jewish teens want those Jewish moments in their lives. Right now, especially in the western world, it's cool to be Jewish. And who could argue that with such positive and openly Jewish role models out there for them to aspire to – including Sacha Baron Cohen, Sara Silverman, Seth Rogen, Idina Menzel, Jon Stewart, Mayim Bialik, and Drake.

To be a Jewish teen today is to be able to determine for oneself when being Jewish is most important and salient – and often this is done in the context of community, both local and global. To understand Jewish education today is to understand when to raise the Jewish self of our learners and also when to harness their other selves – to ensure that we are indeed educating human beings and not just certain parts of the whole.

So you're a Jewish educator or communal professional and you want to know how to make sense of all of this the next time you encounter a Jewish teen:

Hint #1: When a teen approaches you all excited and wants to talk to you about their baseball game, their fragile mental state, or their love interests, don't dismiss these issues because we don't talk about them in "Jewish space and time." These are exactly the issues that we should be talking about with our teens, because that is what is most important to them.

Hint #2: If you want Jewish teens to come to activities that you think are important, be attentive to what's important to them. We should respect our teens enough to go to their recitals and sign petitions that they feel passionately about, because respect is a two-way street.

Hint #3: the next time you feel the urge to ask them about their Jewish identity or Jewish journey – pause. Ask them about their whole selves and who they are as a full human being. I'm sure after a few probes the Jewish stuff will come out but make it clear that that's not the only part of them that you are really interested in.

I don't want to pretend to know any of the youth involved in the above headlines. But I also don't want to judge them harshly. Instead I want to avail myself to the possibility that in their own way each was in some way connecting to the Jewish people. The young person who finds spiritual meaning with fellow Jews at an online Passover seder, the boy who becomes an internet sensation and donates his Bar Mitzvah gifts to the Israelis who found themselves in Sderot's bomb shelters, the youth who find connection and kinship among fellow Jewish avatars in a virtual world, and yes, even the youth who find that showing a photograph of themselves at Auschwitz was significant enough to

share with their Facebook friends as a mark of defiance and celebration over evil. As uncomfortable as it might make us feel, these are the some of the many faces of Jewish peoplehood today and in the years to come – and that is a good thing!

Dr. David Bryfman is the Chief innovation Officer at The Jewish Education Project. He has worked in formal and informal Jewish education in Australia, Israel and North America and has recently edited a book, "Experience and Jewish Education."

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From “Aha” to Action: Creating Agents of Jewish Peoplehood

Keren Dicastro & Leah Maas

Keren: Many people have a hard time defining the term “Jewish Peoplehood”. While exploring for a definition was always a large part of my own personal journey, I have recently come to realize that the first time I felt ‘Jewish Peoplehood’ was more than 10 years ago, long before I ever heard the term.

In 2002 during the height of the Second *Intifada*, I came across a letter published in a national Israeli newspaper entitled “To the People of Israel”. This letter was written by a Jew living in the United States and was addressed to all the Jewish People in the State of Israel. The writer shared his Jewish Journey: starting as an unaffiliated Jew, through his first visit to Israel and through his religious transformation to a *Haredi* (Ultra-Orthodox) Jew. He wrote to all the Israeli soldiers, the mothers and fathers who send their children to war, the police officers and emergency personnel, and to all of Israel’s citizens, sharing his strong support and blessings for their safety during times of insecurity. As a teenager living in Israel, reading this letter was the first time I felt I had a larger support system than my immediate day-to-day relationships and encounters with Israelis. I realized that a broader community existed, of which I am part of because of the common denominator of our being Jewish.

Leah: We had just returned from *Shul*, as we did every Shabbat. I remember what dress I was wearing and what tie my father had around his neck. The phone rang which felt strange on a Shabbat afternoon in our household but as the answering machine picked up and I heard my uncle’s voice, I knew something was wrong. My uncle exclaimed to my father, “Jeff, you have to turn on the TV. Yitzchak Rabin was assassinated by another Jew”. For the next few hours, the TV remained on as my parents sat in silence and utter shock, grappling with what felt like the Jewish People falling apart. It was in that moment that I realized and felt deep within my soul that I was not only a part of my familiar Jewish Community in NJ, but part of an unfamiliar global Jewish People; a part of something much larger than anything I had known.

Both: So, how did two adolescent girls living on two sides of the world, who never met before, end up with these same feelings, and eventually, the same sense of responsibility

for the Jewish People? What was it about each of our individual experiences that were so life changing? What exactly did we experience during these moments, which we desire to replicate for our teen fellows? In retrospect, while that initial feeling we got in the pit of our stomachs was definitely the first step, it was not enough. What made these

Peoplehood education is not only an “Aha Moment”; it is not enough to just feel “Peoplehood”. Peoplehood education is moments followed by other moments followed by intentional opportunities to explore/meet/engage/discover/learn/question, followed by platforms to actually step up and do something. It is our duty as educators to create these platforms for our learners that will allow them to translate these experiences into actions. Our hope is to create experiences that touch something deep within our fellows, and allow them to internalize the sense that they are a part of something much greater, and inspire them to actively be a part of the Jewish People.

experiences so life changing was that both of us were given the space to take these feelings, to question and wrestle with them, and were then empowered to do something with them! Each of us, in our own homes, in our own time, were given the platforms to explore how these feelings affected us and were inspired to make a change and become leaders. Both of us were encouraged by our families to continue participating in Jewish programming and youth movements. Each experience, building on top of the previous one, and the peers, mentors and leaders we met along the way, fostered us to become agents of Jewish Peoplehood. This is why today, both of us have dedicated our lives to working with teens in order to expand and strengthen the fabric of Jewish Peoplehood. Through conversations, through identity & existential examination, through *mifgashim*/cultural exchanges, and through opportunities to succeed and to fail, our learners can and will become the next leaders of the Global Jewish People that we so desperately need them to be.

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Keren Dicastro & Leah Maas served as Rishon LeZion and Greater MetroWest, NJ Diller coordinators and are currently National Coordinator Mentors for International Diller Teen Fellows, training, guiding, and supporting Diller educators across North American & Israel.



Mifgash and Meaning: Challenges and Opportunities for Teen Leadership Development in the 21st Century

Simon Klarfeld

Sometimes I wonder

Where I've been

Who I am, do I fit in?

Make-believing is hard alone

Out here, on my own

From "Out Here On My Own", Michael & Lesley Gore, 1980

Who am I? What is my purpose? And, where do I fit in? – These are fundamental questions for teens as they transition from childhood to adulthood. And these, particularly the third, are questions that the concept of Peoplehood addresses.

Especially with teens, it's all about relationships. Digital natives' ubiquitous use of social media is merely a contemporary expression of the need for connection – and offers an unparalleled opportunity to create and sustain personal relationships with others. Peoplehood education and experiences could not happen at a riper time.

Encounter, exchange, experience, challenge, and embrace are all elements of any serious educational endeavor engaging teens, and teen leadership in particular. This paper will focus on what I consider to be the most powerful of these: the encounter, *mifgash*.

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Note that *mifgash* is both process and outcome: the process of the encounter itself is as important as the end goal of fostering a visceral, emotional attraction to the Jewish People. Our aim is to achieve what Martin Buber described in his essay "Elements of the Interhuman": "... where the dialogue is fulfilled in its being, between partners who have turned to one another in truth, who express themselves without reserve and are free of the desire for semblance, there is brought into being a memorable common fruitfulness which is to be found nowhere else."

Each encounter has four steps, reflecting the four stages of group dynamics that Bruce Tuckman called "forming, storming, norming, and performing." (Tuckman 1965):

1. Preparing the facilitator and the group(s). From my experience as a facilitator, the selection of participants (or at least organizational partners) and the preparation of the two distinct sub-groups participating in the encounter, is critical. While diversity is clearly an important factor in selecting participants in a *mifgash*, there also needs to be enough commonality among the teens across the two sub-groups to create the possibility of community-building among them.

With teen leaders, the facilitator is not only the group's guide through the encounter, but will serve as role model for the teens as they in turn facilitate similar conversations.

2. Developing common group norms and goals. Listening to and working with each other is often a challenge when two very distinct sub-groups from different cultures come together. It is essential to reach an understanding about how this will happen at the very start of the encounter.

3. Creating a "level playing field" among all participants – ensuring that one sub-group does not have "home advantage" and that all participants feel they can equally contribute to the group, teach as well as learn from each other.

4. Harnessing the power of creating or building something together. While building the community from the sub-groups is a positive outcome of the *mifgash*, success can be expressed even more profoundly by collaborative creation in which all participants

can directly experience cooperation and collaboration, and – through reflection – feel pride in a shared accomplishment.

Tuckman, together with Mary Ann Jensen, later added an often ignored yet important fifth stage to the group dynamics model: “adjourning” – saying goodbye and figuring out next steps. So, to the list above, we add a fifth step:

5. Ending and follow-up. Here, 21st century technology offers us a powerful tool. With most of our teens having regular access to social media and using it naturally as a means of communication and collaboration, we have an unprecedented opportunity to extend the *mifgash* to an ongoing experience.

Mifgashim do not have to take place only on the national and international level. We also need to facilitate them in our own backyard, in communities that are more diverse and polarized than perhaps at any other time in recent history.

The *mifgash* can play a central role in fulfilling the goals of Peoplehood education: to create meaningful personal relationships with other Jews – in our community and around the world – that can last a lifetime; to learn about the concept of peoplehood in a profound way through direct experience and reflection; to learn Jewish values and texts regarding relationships, particularly between and among Jews; to offer teen leaders inspiring models of facilitating inter- and intra-cultural dialogue for the future; and to challenge, strengthen, and clarify individuals’ identities, perceptions, and views.

Let us begin at home, and reach out globally, reflecting the beauty, complexity, and diversity of the Jewish People.

Simon Klarfeld is the Executive Director of Young Judeaa

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Peoplehood Consciousness – A Defining Quality for Jewish Leadership

Ezra Kopelowitz

How do we make sure that Jewish teens embrace both a passion for the Jewish collective enterprise as well as a responsibility for its future? Based on four years of evaluation research for the Diller Teen Fellowship, we have isolated a single dominant factor, which distinguishes the teen who is most likely to be a leader for his or her generation from others. That factor is an intellectual engagement with the challenges facing the Jewish people today and a commitment to translate his or her ideas into action. In other words, a Jewish leader has an opinion about what is good for the Jews and is willing to act on it, the combination of which we label as “Peoplehood Consciousness.”

Peoplehood Consciousness feeds and shapes a number of other key characteristics, at least some of which are present for any Diller alumni whom we categorize as showing Peoplehood Consciousness. These are:

1. A pro-active Jewish identity that is not dependent on an existing Jewish framework

These young people seek out Jewish meaning and engagement wherever they find themselves.

2. Jewish journey - continued Jewish learning and on-going experimentation

The Diller alumni with Peoplehood Consciousness imbue their lives with Jewish relevance, continually experimenting and adapting as they move from high school to college, to travel, to a career, and eventually to raising a family.

3. Awareness of the Jewish other and an embrace of Jewish pluralism

A common virtue of Diller alumni with Peoplehood Consciousness is a strong awareness of the Jewish other and an embrace of Jewish pluralism. While other Jewish organizations produce teen leaders with the other characteristics described here, Diller is among the few programs that focus on the encounter between Jews who are different from one another. For a year these Jewish teens interact intensively with Jews who are different than themselves, in terms of religious and cultural outlook and in terms of national origin. They also receive an intensive exposure to Israeli and Diaspora Jewish society. The result is a sense of mission to nurturing

How do we make sure that Jewish teens embrace both a passion for the Jewish collective enterprise as well as a responsibility for its future? Based on four years of evaluation research for the Diller Teen Fellowship, we have isolated a single dominant factor, which distinguishes the teen who is most likely to be a leader for his or her generation from others. That factor is an intellectual engagement with the challenges facing the Jewish people today and a commitment to translate his or her ideas into action. In other words, a Jewish leader has an opinion about what is good for the Jews and is willing to act on it, the combination of which we label as “Peoplehood Consciousness.”

Peoplehood that goes beyond the good of any particular Jewish group. The following are representative excerpts from two alumni.

Question: Since Diller, have you given much thought to the challenges facing the Jewish people? What are the challenges that you have given thought to?
“The ways in which our community is oppressed and closed off to different groups of people; the ways in which the relationship between Israel and the Diaspora has not been fully figured out; the ways in which we need to integrate into non-Jewish societies and the ways we should hold back. North-American Jews don’t speak good Jewish language, and I find that scary for our community. Language has always been essential to the Jewish identity. I worry what will happen for the long term if we lose that.”

Question: Are there actions that you are currently taking or plan to take in the future to address the challenges you just described?

"The elections on my campus didn't go well for the Jewish Groups. We lost representation on the student government board and became a true minority unable to stop more BDS resolutions against Israel from passing. Rather than attending the student government meeting when I knew the Jews would lose the vote on another anti-Israel resolution, we organized an event at Chabad promoting Jewish bonding in the community. I felt that even though the Jews were losing politically they could at least find strength in connecting with each other and having pride in our faith."

4. A strong sense of Jewish culture, history and civilization

A person with Peoplehood consciousness sees his or her world on a larger historical stage. For example one alum reflects on what is important to him, in terms of his Jewish identity: *"For me it is important to pass on a culture that has lived for thousands of years and to continue to practice aspects of that culture. Living in Israel is a big part of that as well. Practicing the religion, continuing the culture, and working to make Israel the best place it can be. I see the rise in anti-Semitism in the world at the moment. A lot of it is a façade of anti-Semitism being hidden as anti-Zionism. If our State is going to be the center of some people's bigotry, we need to fight to make the State as perfect as it can be in order to remove the façade of blaming Israel's actions for their anti-Semitism."*

5. Attaching importance to particularly Jewish volunteering

Almost all Diller Teen Fellowship alumni are active volunteers. The alumni with Peoplehood Consciousness channel at least some of their volunteer energy towards the Jewish world or on behalf of the Jewish world. They view their volunteering as an expression of their commitment to further Jewish values and address challenges, which are central to the good of the Jewish People (broadly defined).

6. The centrality of Israel in their Jewish lives

Almost all the alumni express a very strong connection to Israel, most of whom credit that connection to their Diller experience. The difference between those with Peoplehood Consciousness and the others is in the intensity and depth of the connection. Israel is a central aspect of their Jewish identity. They engage others on issues relating to Israel and devote a lot of thought regarding the relationship between Jews living inside and outside of Israel.

Dr. Ezra Kopelowitz is a sociologist specializing in Jewish education and is the CEO of Research Success Technologies.



Jewish Conversations with our Teens 2.0

Arie Levy

*EVERY SINGLE PERSON IS OBLIGED TO SAY: THE WORLD WAS CREATED FOR MY SAKE
(Mishna, Sanhedrin chpt 4, 5)*

Each generation has the tendency of describing the next one as being so every different and challenging. However, today's teens are truly facing unprecedented challenges related to globalization, technology, identity, etc. These issues, of course, amplify the already demanding grappling with such heavy subjects as Jewishness, Jewish Identity and the connection to Am Yisrael (my simple reference to Peoplehood). This is why, so many local, regional or international Jewish educational organizations focusing on the content of teen programming, need to refine and upgrade the level of discussion and dialogue we carry on with our next generation. The Diller Teen Fellows is a platform solidly positioned to further pursue such upgrades in the Jewish conversations.

Teen leadership development cannot be just about replacing the current Jewish Community leadership. The upgrade required here is giving them the sense and tools to reshape the Jewish world (no less!). Our programs need to contribute to connecting the teens to global Jewish issues, to developing collective responsibility and to plugging them into the “Jewish electrical current”

Here are a couple of practical points I suggest exploring, based mostly on my experience in interacting with teens and their educators.

The few vs. the many. We expect the outmost from our teens from a leadership perspective. This is an age of “the many” and less of “the few” which means that if in previous generations, we could expect clear outcomes investing in select group of leaders, today, we need to be mindful that we live in the era of “crowdism”: crowd wisdom, crowd funding, crowd networking, etc. Hence, our Peoplehood approach cannot be elitist. The circles need to be broadened and our teens in the leadership programs must take an active role in making this happen. Thus, a successful “impact” or follow up program, is one in which the teen leaders focus on engaging their peers into the learning, debate and action around Jewish Identity, Israel and Jewish Peoplehood, in original and creative ways.

“Parve” vs. Opinioned. Too many of the teens participating in our programs, end up without an opinion on much. I call it the Parve phenomenon – not meat, nor dairy. We cannot expect teen involvement without the passion of taking a position or of being critical and the development of a clearer opinion on general or Jewish matters. While they should definitely continue to be *respectful* of all opinions, teens need to take risks. They need to deepen their knowledge on matters that caught their interest, while allowing for the possibility that their opinions may change some day. Educators need to infuse in them the drive to decide what they believe in and what they stand for – not just learn how to walk on the fence.

Peoplehood vs. Zionism

We run programs that speak the language of Peoplehood that celebrates all forms of Judaism, in all countries. Sometimes, we forget that it does create a tension with the centrality of Israel and Zionism. In some cases, the word Zionism has even disappeared from written curricula. Let us open the discussion, rather than serve them microwavable “tv-dinner” answers. They need to know that it has only been a couple of decades since the majority of Jews live in freedom, that this situation is all new to us, and that we need to be patient before jumping to conclusions about our global destiny. The tension between religion, nationhood and multiple-identities will emerge and we need to be prepared to address it.

Universalism and particularism

While Tikun Olam seems to be included in the current curriculum of our leadership development programs, we need to be mindful that the concept will not be diluted to express any act of goodwill to such an extent that it will lose all meaning. On the other hand, it is clear that we cannot just limit ourselves anymore to the walls of our own

“clan”. Our educators can encourage finding the right balance between the universal and particular calling of our youth, while being mindful of the Jewish tradition of reaching out to the needs of your own city before the one’s of another town’s.

Pluralism vs. Unity

Pluralism, in our programs, limits itself many times to our own comfort zone. We spend too much time learning on what divides us instead on focusing on what unites this people. Usually the divides are around old and irrelevant categories or Jewish boxes that served well those movements that created them. Identities today are multi-dimensional and teens will adopt several layers of definitions. We cannot however only limit ourselves to exposing them to denominational panels and expect them to have exhausted the richness of Jewish Mosaic.

In conclusion, teen leadership development cannot be just about replacing the current Jewish Community leadership. The upgrade required here is giving them the sense and tools to reshape the Jewish world (no less!). Our programs need to contribute to connecting the teens to global Jewish issues, to developing collective responsibility and to plugging them into the “Jewish electrical current” (aka as Jewish Neshama). This has to be done by focusing more attention to widening the circles, helping them position themselves on these issues, deepening the understanding of the Israel-Diaspora dynamics, deciding on our role as a People in the family of Nations, and exposing them to a richer sense of identity.

Arie Levy is Director of Israel and Overseas of Federation CJA Montreal with JFC-UIA. He has held many positions in Jewish Communal life in Montreal and Israel, including work in informal Jewish education. He recently finished his M.A in Non Profit Management at Ben Gurion University. Arie lives in Metar, next to Beer Sheva with his wife Ruth and 5 daughters.



Citizenship and Peoplehood in the Lives of Jewish Teens

Deborah Meyer

Today's teens are coming of age in an era of intense competition. To get into ever-more selective colleges, they supplement AP courses with tutoring, push their bodies with professional athletic coaches, and take on staggering loads of extracurricular activities.

These formerly extraordinary efforts to stand out increasingly have become the norm for many in the Jewish community, bringing new levels of financial and emotional stress for teens and their parents.

In this high-pressure context, it is understandable that many programs for Jewish teens have embraced society's focus on leadership. And such programs are essential to the cultivation of future Jewish leadership.

At the same time, we must ask an important question: *Unless we help teens understand what it takes to build and participate as members of a Jewish community, and unless we give teens a reason to belong, will there be robust communities for these leaders to lead?*

Moving Traditions' research and our years of program experience, along with a wealth of scholarly research and testimony from teens, all point to the fact that Jewish teens lack opportunities to explore what it means to grow into responsible, resilient Jewish adults in community with their Jewish peers.

Our challenge is to give Jewish teens both the practical skills to build community and alternatives to a culture defined by competition – to give teens authentic and meaningful experiences of belonging that connect them to themselves, their peers, and the Jewish community.

Moving Traditions' has worked to leverage its field-tested programs *Rosh Hodesh: It's a Girl Thing!* and *Shevet Achim: The Brotherhood* to do just this for more than 15,000 teens across the country. By fostering the creation of *minyanim*, groups of ten teenage girls or boys in the same grade that meet regularly over time with trained adult mentors, Moving Traditions helps teens learn the value of meaningful participation in Jewish community, navigating human relationships within a group of peers.

Central to Moving Traditions' educational model is the creation of a safe space for teens to openly explore with their peers fundamental questions of identity and society. Mentors guide the teens in connecting enduring Jewish values to the issues they care about most, including friendship, sexuality, academic pressure, competition, and stress.

David, a *Shevet Achim* leader in New York, wrote in his group's third year, "Our discussions have been intense. For example, two of the guys were at a party where they saw a sexual assault perpetrated by an intoxicated 15-year-old boy. The police were involved. After they spoke about what happened, we discussed personal boundaries, respect, and sexual consent. We also talked about alcohol and drugs. This wasn't 'just say no', but a talk about the reality that people in high school drink and smoke and how important it is to put checks on yourself so that you don't harm yourself or others.

"In all of our conversations, we stress how Judaism teaches us to be balanced – to be honest about our deepest human desires and, at the same time, to control our impulses.

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How do you walk the line between what you want to do and what is sensitive to others? Asking that is a core Jewish value that we address in *Shevet Achim*.”

For more than a decade, Moving Traditions has continually worked to sharpen and focus this model of Jewish teen education, with 1,400 groups of girls meeting under the auspices of more than 300 institutional partners. A recent independent evaluation by Drs. Pearl Beck and Tobin Belzer, looking at girls who participated in 2008-2010, demonstrates that Moving Traditions’ *Rosh Hodesh* program helps teen girls value personal connection to their peers and to Jewish life. The study, combining qualitative and quantitative research, revealed that through their participation in *Rosh Hodesh* girls are achieving four key outcomes:

1. Building greater self-esteem.
2. Believing that they can take action on behalf of themselves, other women, and their Jewish and secular communities.
3. Deepening their peer-to-peer relationships with other Jewish girls.
4. Cultivating deeper Jewish connections throughout high school, into college, and beyond.

Because Moving Traditions’ programs serve as training grounds for teens to build meaningful Jewish community, as a result, more Jewish teens are growing into adulthood with confidence, compassion, and a lifelong commitment to Jewish community. We therefore expect to hear more teens say about their Jewish experiences, as one young woman told the researchers, “*Rosh Hodesh* taught me to see myself as a part of a community.” And if more young Jews see themselves as integrally connected, they will be much more likely to participate as leaders and members, building the Jewish community of the future.

Deborah Meyer is the Founder and Executive Director of Moving Traditions, whose award-winning programs, *Rosh Hodesh: It's a Girl Thing!* and *Shevet Achim: The Brotherhood* empower thousands of Jewish teen girls and boys to question gender restrictions and make meaning in Jewish community.



Essential Lessons for Educating Jewish Teens

Josh Miller

Over the past several years the Jim Joseph Foundation has invested significant time and resources into deepening our understanding of how the Jewish community can better engage teens in effective, compelling Jewish learning experiences. Two essential lessons we have learned are that:

- 1) Having a meaningful influence on teens in any context starts by taking a genuine interest in what matters most to them.
- 2) The role of adults is to work *with teens*, in partnership, to help *them* to create Jewish learning experiences they seek.

The adolescent years represent an important stage in the development of one's identity. It is an intense time of discovery and experimentation. For many teens, this stage of life also is stressful and complicated, as they navigate increasing pressures from parents, peers and their communities about what they must do, believe and achieve.

When at its best, the Jewish community has much to offer to help teens face these challenges—supportive community, adult role models, guidance on ways to strive towards a life of meaning, purpose and fulfillment. Conversely, the Jewish community also has much to learn *from* teens; they offer a unique perspective on how Judaism is relevant today, and they are a window into how future generations will continue to shape it.

But, for teen education and engagement to be a positive experience, Jewish adults must listen carefully and maintain an open mind.

This guiding principle means that Jewish adults who seek to educate teens need to first set aside their adult Jewish agendas and constructs—whether in politics, ideology, or desired attitudes and behaviors. If we have specific lessons to impart to teens, our challenge is to set them aside and begin by earning their trust. Then we can guide our teens towards experiences where we invite them to come to their own conclusions about Jewish topics that we believe are important. The best Jewish educators I have

met accomplish this by asking good questions, listening, being their authentic selves, modeling their beliefs and values through their actions, and integrating Jewish content that is meaningful and relevant, all while letting teens lead the way.

When asked about what matters to them, different teens I have met have provided different answers. But some interests and desires that have consistently been referenced include: gaining the core skills and experiences they need to navigate life as a teen; helping prepare for college and a career; learning how to stay healthy, both physically and mentally; having relationships with adults who are willing to listen to them; expressing their creative selves; feeling connected to something bigger than themselves; making a difference in the world.

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What can we, as a Jewish community, do to support these teens?

- Encourage our best and brightest to devote their professional and/or volunteer talents towards working with teens. Provide these adults with high quality training in Jewish experiential education and adolescent development. Offer appropriate incentives to ensure that adults who work with teens receive the respect and compensation they deserve.
- Provide many more experiences for teens to step into leadership roles in the Jewish community. This applies not only to programs for teens specifically, but across all of our organizations. Invite teens to have internships, take on board positions, attend and speak at conferences, contribute their voice to writing projects, and help plan and lead new initiatives.
- Support our teen leaders by ensuring that they have adults who are ready to work in partnership with them to help them succeed in their leadership roles. We must remember to see these teens not as 'leaders of the future' but rather as 'leaders of today.'
- Help teens cultivate their own sense of why Judaism matters to them by allowing them to know and understand our own relationships to Judaism. If Judaism is going to be relevant to them as teens, we have to model how and why it is relevant to us as adults.

For any Jewish adults who are apprehensive about this proposed approach, test it out. In my experience, the most enriching part of developing the Jim Joseph Foundation's teen education and engagement strategy has been the opportunities to learn directly from Jewish teens. They have been some of my greatest teachers. Certainly, these teens have helped me develop a better appreciation for how the Jewish community can best support them and their peers. Beyond that, they have provided my Foundation colleagues and me with new insights about how we can be better Jewish leaders, learners, creators, and supporters of meaningful Jewish life.

Josh Miller is a Senior Program Officer for the Jim Joseph Foundation, which seeks to foster compelling, effective Jewish learning experiences for young Jews in the United States.



Strengthening Global Jewish Peoplehood One Friend at a Time

By David Rittberg

This past February, Atlanta trembled with the raucous cheers of over 3,000 Jewish teens from around the world. They came from the U.S., Bulgaria, Israel, Chile and many other countries to take part in the annual BBYO International Convention. The excitement was palpable. The hall was packed not with mere acquaintances, but with co-captains, co-dreamers and co-builders of a more vibrant Jewish future. It was full of teen leaders who felt deeply connected to one another, to their peers back home, to Israel and to the global Jewish people.

It was a beautiful scene to behold, and as funders and Jewish professionals, we know that doesn't happen by accident or circumstance. Organizations like BBYO, NFTY and others have been laying the groundwork to ensure that every Jewish teen has the opportunity to connect with Jewish values and traditions, engage with Israel and the Jewish people and find their place within a global network of peers eager to make a difference.

At such a crucial moment for Israel and the Jewish people, how do we ensure that scenes like the one in Atlanta grow and multiply? What's in the secret sauce?

For the ingredients, we at the Schusterman Family Foundation have joined with our colleagues and partners in turning to teen leaders themselves and organizations of all sizes that support thriving teen networks, as well as undertaking substantive evaluation and research of these efforts, to identify common principles.

Offer teens the chance to feel transcendence and belonging. Teens want to feel and actually be part of something larger than themselves. That is why, rather than engaging teens in silos, BBYO members are intentionally connected to a vast network of peers across the globe and asked to build the Jewish future alongside one another. They share more than an association or a common membership. They join each other as brothers and sisters on the ground working to make their shared goals a reality. As a result, their bonds are real and lasting. This is true for both teens who see themselves as Jewish leaders and those who are still exploring what Jewish thought and values mean to them. The two groups complement each other and create a powerful whole—and both

deserve experiences that engage and inspire them to grow their leadership abilities and strengthen their Jewish identities.

Let teens take the reins so that they might form leadership habits that last well beyond the teen years. Teens are eager for the keys to the car (literally and figuratively). They are not interested in being passive consumers. They want to create, build, recruit for and run experiences themselves. That's why successful teen programs put teens in the driver's seat. When teens are empowered to create the Jewish life they and their friends want to participate in, they rise to the occasion in truly amazing ways. They grow as community organizers and inspire others to join them, partner with them and become leaders in their own right. By giving them the ability to share ideas and develop networks, teens are able to make more of an impact on their communities and chart a course of similar engagement for the future.

Provide in-person opportunities and digital channels for ongoing connection and leadership development. We know by now that teens never stop communicating with each other. (For an important take on this topic, check out Danah Boyd's *It's Complicated: The Social Lives of Networked Teens*.) Their ability to stay connected is not limited to any one format or location. They crave IRL ("in real life" for those without teenagers in the house) connections and, at the same time, fully expect to stay in touch in a variety of digital spaces. It's up to us to offer all of the above: programs and opportunities that speak to the interests of teens as well as access to virtual networks and experiences that allow for continued engagement. A greater emphasis on integrating both the online and in-person will not only foster greater social cohesion, but also help teens build stronger, more persistent social networks they can tap into for future community-building activities.

The Jewish community is blessed with a rising generation with tremendous potential to shape a bright future. Their potential, however, is not realized alone. To truly empower teens takes the guidance of dedicated mentors, facilitation by savvy professionals and the support of multiple organizations collaborating to serve them effectively. It takes

effort on all of our parts to spark and sustain a path for teens that help them to feel the joy of Jewish life and peoplehood.

Our efforts will be well worth the payoff. However challenging the world becomes, we have before us a generation that is redefining what it means to care for, include and celebrate one another. They are shaping what a global Jewish people can look like today and setting the stage for future generations to do the same. Our job now is to support and amplify their efforts so that all teens find their place in this groundswell to the benefit of the Jewish community and beyond.

David Rittberg is a Senior Program Officer at the Charles and Lynn Schusterman Family Foundation, a global organization committed to igniting the passion and unleashing the power in young people to create positive change in the Jewish community and beyond. www.schusterman.org

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Shabbat in Montreal: A Diller Peoplehood Journey

Max Rochman & Aliza Caplan

Max:

Outside the snow was falling in sheets, the roads were paved with ice and the signs were in French and kilometers; I sat bundled up around a Shabbat dinner table. None of the faces at the table were familiar except for two: Noam and Lara. We met Noam and Lara while working as Junior Counselors on the Diller Teen Fellows program. In total, we had spent less than a month with them over the course of three years - two days here and a week there, separated by months to a year. Even so, the connections and friendships we forged in that time were well worth the five hour drive in the middle of January.

As special as this Shabbat meal was, it was so “normal”. The words that we recited were identical to the words we had chanted the previous summer as we gathered with hundreds of other Jewish teens - American, Canadian and Israeli - for an unbelievable Shabbat in Israel. The words we sang sitting around the table in Montreal were no different than the words I’ve said in my home in New Jersey. During dinner, conversation flowed in French, English, German, Hebrew and even a little Yiddish. As I placed my spoon back into an empty bowl of matzoh ball soup, it hit me: this is peoplehood.

Aliza:

Diller understands the concept of Jewish Peoplehood as “the idea of a collective Jewish experience, flourishing now and in the future”. Diller brought peoplehood to life by physically placing me in a room with Jewish teens from all over North America and Israel of different backgrounds, whose identities ranged from “just Jewish” to “Orthodox” to “Humanistic” to name only a few. In doing so, Diller provided a platform for serious personal reflection about what it means to me to be Jewish and encouraged me to explore what Judaism represents for my peers around the globe. Over the course of our own Diller experiences, Max and I engaged with questions of our own identity while forming lasting bonds and friendships. Our paths following Diller are closely tied to the idea of Jewish Peoplehood.

The product of a conservative Jewish family, USY and Ramah, it was not until Diller that I internalized pluralism and peoplehood. Peoplehood motivated my family to host a pre-army Israeli completing her year of service in our community for six months (incidentally, also a Diller alumnus). Peoplehood permeates my life as a senior at the University of Pennsylvania and Vice President of Penn Hillel, a hub for Jewish student life on a campus with 2,500 Jewish undergraduates. Diller introduced me to the idea of peoplehood, and in doing so ignited in me a passion for the broader Jewish community, a love for Israel and the confidence to explore Judaism on my own terms.

Max:

After working with Aliza during the summer of 2012, I decided I wanted to continue with my career in the Diller program and applied to be the Junior Counselor Mentor. The job entailed advising the following year's JC's through phone calls, personal workshops and traveling with various Diller cohorts in the summer. It was then that my love of the country and the Jewish people grew even stronger. The relationships I developed with people all over North America as well as Israel opened my eyes to what it meant to be part of the greater Jewish community. After leaving Israel at the end of the summer, I felt a void in my ties to the Jewish people. After completing my sophomore year of college,

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I left school and made *aliyah* to join the IDF as a lone soldier. Today, I proudly serve in the 202 battalion of the Paratroopers Brigade.

Aliza and Max:

To us, peoplehood means that our individual practices and relationships to Judaism are only two pieces in the larger sphere of collective modern Judaism. We are inspired to explore, learn from, pick up or reject others' specific practices while still connecting to the underlying values and experiences that unite us all as Jews. As we leave college and the army and enter the next phases of our lives, we have no doubt that we will find ourselves at a Shabbat table - in Montreal, Philadelphia, Israel, New Jersey, or anywhere else for that matter - enjoying the beauty and magic of a tradition that we all share, yet practice in different ways. And for this, we are thankful.

Max Rochman and Aliza Caplan are alumni of the Greater MetroWest, NJ cohort of the Diller Teen Fellows program. Today, Aliza is a student at the University of Pennsylvania and Max is serving as a paratrooper in the IDF.



Jewish Peoplehood – IT'S ALL ABOUT RELATIONSHIPS

Ginette Searle

As a teenager in the 1970s, a note to a boyfriend was carefully crafted, workshopped with a best friend and written, then rewritten on your prettiest stationary and surreptitiously delivered.

Today, hey, it's a whatsapp conversation, multiple instant messages silently vibrating throughout the classroom, possibly forwarded on to the BFF, squeezed in between the tens of other whatsapp group conversations happening simultaneously. They "talk" in abbreviations, digits, acronyms, emojis and way too many exclamation marks (K, gr8, cu l8er!!!!). It happens at lightning speed, fingers flying fast over minute keyboards. Welcome to the world of the teens and of the 20-teens.

Communication is our principal tool for developing peoplehood. Whether it's a discussion over a coffee, a skype with overseas grandparents, or by sharing photos on Instagram, personal connections remain the fundamental building blocks of understanding, of relationships and therefore of defining what unites us.

Jewish peoplehood is, by definition, a personal enterprise. It's about relationships, about connections between individuals as the basis of connections between communities. Jewish identity is a concept based on relationships with others. It's no coincidence that common measures of Jewish identity include frequency of attendance at synagogue (Beit Knesset - the place where we assemble); how often people share Shabbat meals with their families and who they marry. Indeed, our communal, familial and personal relationships go a long way to defining our Jewish identity.

For teens today, their grandparents, or most likely their great grandparents lived during the time of the holocaust and would remember the establishment of the State of Israel. Their parents probably don't remember the 6 Day War but may have been born in time to recall Israel's success at Entebbe. The sense of identity in those generations is axiomatic. Inter marriage was the big taboo for these first and second generations of the survivors.

Today's youth, however, were born into a world where Israel is no longer the darling in the media and we hear of reticence among them to support Israel in public because of what's portrayed in the media. Indeed, today's youth could look at Israel with pride about technology and innovation, but as a young man once said to me, just because Nokia was developed in Finland doesn't make us *feel* anything about Finland.

So how do we engage young people in Jewish and Zionist leadership in this generation?

Youth movements in Australia are strong and remain a most successful enterprise in engaging young people in their Jewish identity, Zionism and activism. A leader of the Zionist youth movements recently corrected a description of youth as "the leaders of the future" to "the young leaders of today" which indeed they are. Jewish Day Schools, which are attended by approximately 70% of Australian Jewish high school students, are continually raising the bar in the area of informal education, *hadracha*, and extra-curricular activism and the students are responding with enthusiasm.

The influences of the "near peers" – madrichim, the "cool" informal education teams, Israeli shlichim who visit to run the highly anticipated "Zionist Seminars" in schools – on young people is invaluable, something we understood anecdotally and has been confirmed through recent research. The influence is based on the relationships formed. When something happens in Israel, teens may be interested for intellectual reasons, but they **care** because they have a relationship with someone who's there. What they don't read in the news, they see on their friends' Facebook feeds.

Old school, new school. The teens of today would barely recognise a classroom of the 1970s – copying from the blackboard's been replaced by a click to download the slideshow on the iPad. Instead of lectures, there are multi-media presentations, videos, interactive programs which acknowledge the fact that today's youth multi-task.

So we might scratch our heads and wonder how the teens today can conduct so many conversations at the same time, what it means when they post photographs of their breakfast on Instagram or when "talking" became typing. Whilst the language seems different, the discussions are familiar – who am I, what is meaningful to me and how can I make myself relevant in this world.

So whether it's at school, at a youth movement program or in a dedicated leadership development program like the Diller Teen Fellows, the principle remains: the most important values and engagements are and always must be the intimate, relational and personal.

Here in Melbourne, Australia we are excited to embark on our first Diller Teen Fellows program, partnering with the Golan Region in Israel. We are set to bring together 40 young people from these two communities from opposite sides of the world, to get them talking about what defines them, what's important to them and most of all, what unites them. No doubt the discussions will be vibrant, interesting and intellectual. But it's the friendships that will be formed that will inspire and motivate them to continue to engage beyond the duration of the program. These relationships will create the young leaders of today and tomorrow.

Ginette Searle is the Executive Director of the Zionist Federation of Australia, and mother to 4 teens/ young adults.

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Are you part of my story? Becoming a Community of Interpretation

Rebecca Voorwinde and Mishael Zion

A December Shabbat was waning in the Connecticut countryside as almost fifty young Israeli and American Jews – the Bronfman Fellows of 2012 - sat in a circle to discuss whether they actually cared about each other. “Are you part of my story?” they asked, boldly, critically, lovingly. Over an Israeli summer and an American winter, they had become friends and study partners, seeing with their own eyes the successes and challenges of each community. Now, they were ready to ask the deeper question: Are you part of my “we”?

The facilitated conversation was impacted by recent events in the news. A day prior, twenty schoolchildren and their teachers were murdered in Sandy Hook Connecticut. And, a month earlier Israel faced Operation Pillar of Defense. The Israeli Fellows felt under attack and were surprised that they didn’t hear from their American counterparts during the violence. “Did you forget about us?” they asked, “are you only willing to love Israel if it’s a place of sun and history, not if it’s a place of messiness and danger?” Similarly, for the American Bronfmanim their own grief in response to the school shooting opened new questions about their role as passionate participants in the American public sphere and about how best to convey their commitments to their Israeli peers. The Israelis were taken aback; wasn’t this just another violent American news story without direct relevance? As one American fellow tried to explain, “we saw the worst face of our own country, and we are embarrassed. We want to honor those lives by making this country a better place.” For both groups, experiences of tragedy on their home soil were deeply felt and deeply personal. For Jewish peoplehood to make sense to these young people, each group needed to know that their friends living an ocean away respected and appreciated their own narrative as equally valid to their own.

The Bronfman Fellowships has over two decades of trial, error and creativity in bringing together Israeli and North American Jews. Each year we convene two “mifgashim” for the 26 North American and 20 Israeli seventeen year olds selected to become Bronfmanim. The mifgashim – a quarter of each group’s overall programming– are grounded in values of mutual respect, equality and openness. The blemishes are shared, as are the blessings; the creativity alongside the apathy. For the generation we work

with, it is an encounter between two communities that are “at home” in their respective countries. On Bronfman, we don’t wipe away differences between the two communities under a shiny lacquer of peoplehood, but give room for their contradictions. It is an encounter that for most Fellows will still lead back to two separate paths, thus raising the question: If we are not one tale, how are we nevertheless part of each other’s story?

The conversation is often tested through the question of solidarity. At the core of our programming is the assumption that Israeli-North American discourse needs to fix the imbalance where American Jews are expected to feel solidarity with Israel and Israeli struggles, but Israelis are rarely educated to understand the concerns and values of the large Jewish community of North America. Yet a discourse centered in solidarity reduces the Jewish conversation to a lachrymose and alarmist place. It seems to be the “last bastion” of communality for a people that no longer share a binding land, practice (Halakha) or God. Is there anything left beyond solidarity?

Back at the Bronfman Winter Mifgash, it was Hanukkah and we re-convened ourselves as a “Beit Midrash,” sitting down for a joint text study about the holiday. The learning centered on how various Jewish communities, from secular Zionists to American liberal Rabbis, reinterpreted the holiday in radically divergent ways during the 20th century. Through text study, we offer the Fellows new tools for creating a different layer of “peoplehood” a way to understand Judaism as a Beit Midrash. We are more than a community of dogmatic solidarity; we are a community of interpretation. The ancient Jewish pastime of rival reinterpretation takes place through moments of vibrant and passionate discourse. The beauty of mifgash is that these encounters enable us to see ourselves, our homes, and Judaism through a lens broader than our own. Centering mifgashim in text study is our way for young Jewish leaders to feel part of the same

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story. **We are part of each other's story not only in moments of solidarity, but also in our retelling of joint stories in divergent ways, and in coming together to share these divergent ways, argue about them – and celebrate them.**

Rebecca Voorwinde and Rabbi Mishael Zion are the co-directors of The Bronfman Fellowships, a community of over 1000 young Jewish leaders from Israel and America. Beginning with a highly selective fellowship experience at age seventeen, grounded in Jewish text study and a pluralistic approach, "Bronfmanim" take part in a vibrant alumni community which inspires action and reflection among a new generation of Jewish leaders.