

## **The Peoplehood Papers 17**

June 2016 | Sivan 5776

# **Engaging Millennials with Jewish Peoplehood**

What Does It Take?

Editor: Shlomi Ravid

Design and Production: Stephanie & Ruti Design | Printed in Israel 2016

Published by the Center for Jewish Peoplehood Education  
[publications@jpeoplehood.org](mailto:publications@jpeoplehood.org)

# From the Editor

## Shlomi Ravid

The Jewish establishment's anxiety regarding the Jewish identity of millennials is not unfounded. The emergence of a new generation of Jews who were born and raised in open society with a freedom to choose their Judaism does not necessarily promise continuity. Furthermore, individualism, egocentrism and criticism of existing establishments, tendencies associated with Millennials, created room for additional concerns. These concerns seem, at face value at least, to relate most acutely to the collective dimension of Judaism – Jewish Peoplehood.

We decided to challenge some of the above assumptions by exploring the relations between millennials and Peoplehood through the practical lens of the Peoplehood nurturing work in that age group. We engaged three groups of stake holders in this conversation: 1) Senior professionals of organizations focusing on millennials; 2) Educators; 3) Millennials. Some key questions we asked were:

- What are the unique challenges of engaging young adults with Jewish Peoplehood in today's context? How do we respond to these challenges in practice?
- How do we assure the integration of the values of Peoplehood into the worldviews of our future leaders?
- How do we make sure that millennials embrace both a passion for the Jewish collective enterprise as well as a responsibility for its future?... and that their passion is followed by actions?

Before highlighting some of the key points that emerged from this collection of essays it is worth noting that in general the story of engaging millennials with Peoplehood appears to be a success story. Millennials seem, in their own way, to embrace their version of Jewish Peoplehood. The organizations working with them have adopted creative learner centered approaches that enable and empower the Millennials to develop their own voice, without losing sight of the overall goal. This does not mean that a comprehensive solution to the millennial challenge has been achieved. Yet the fact that strategic, innovative and effective pedagogic approaches have been developed holds great promise to it.

Some points to highlight:

Millennials (see Kuperard, Olson, Fisher, Bloomfield) may reject old frameworks but the notion of Jewish collectivity as expressed through community, social activism and Tikun Olam resonates with them. They are not monolithic, hold on to multiple identities and pursue universalistic values. The search for meaning seems to be the central driving force to their engagement.

Engaging millennials calls for a thoughtful structural-educational approach (Gorlin, Jacobson-Maisels, Raviv, Katler and Epstein) and educational innovation (Mali, Chertok & Mittelberg, Raviv).

Jewish communities and organizations (Cousens, Okret, Herman & Fishman, Fisher, Eisenman, Chertok & Mittelberg) can adjust to engaging millennials on their terms and will actually benefit from this process. The dynamics of empowerment, partnership and pluralism reinvigorate the organizations throughout.

Engaging through service (Eisenman, Kuperard, Fisher) and sustainability (Bloomfield) provide effective gateways to Peoplehood. Involving the millennials in the community decision making process and trusting their choices (Okret, Eisenman) may provide the key to their long term integration into the community.

In conclusion this exchange of opinions should leave those concerned with the Jewish future optimistic. Millennials may be grappling with the right language to express their connection to Jewish Peoplehood but appreciate belonging to a larger whole. The organizations working with them seem to have developed creative strategies and pedagogies to engage them in the conversation and integrate their voice (voices) into the communal choir. It does leave one curious as to what kind of a Jewish world will emerge as the millennials take charge. Different no doubt, yet for sure more colorful.

We would like to thank the ROI Community for all their help in putting this collection of essays together, and all our articles' contributors. Responses and comments are welcome to [shlomi@jpeoplehood.org](mailto:shlomi@jpeoplehood.org)

# Table of Contents

<b>Feed the Soil, Not the Plants Introduction</b>	<b>6</b>
Rebecca Bloomfield	
<b>The Dialogue of Jewish Peoplehood: Millennial Children of Inter-marriage</b>	<b>8</b>
Fern Chertok and David Mittelberg	
<b>Reweaving Jewish Community</b>	<b>10</b>
Beth Cousens	
<b>Jewish Peoplehood: From Value to Action</b>	<b>12</b>
Sarah Eisenman	
<b>Engaging with Jewish Millennials about Peoplehood</b>	<b>15</b>
Liz Fisher	
<b>Using Our SMARTs to Engage Jewish Millennials</b>	<b>17</b>
No'a Gorlin	
<b>Giving Circles: Philanthropy as Peoplehood</b>	<b>20</b>
Felicia Herman and Jackie Fishman	
<b>Peoplehood: What Have You Done for Me Lately?</b>	<b>23</b>
James Jacobson-Maisels	
<b>Engaging with Empathy</b>	<b>26</b>
Aaron Katler and Taylor Epstein	
<b>Peoplehood: Millennials and Tikkun Olam</b>	<b>28</b>
Maytal Kuperard	
<b>Self and System: The Case for Adaptive Leadership in Advancing Global Jewish Interconnectivity</b>	<b>30</b>
Sarah Mali	
<b>Engaging Jewish Young Adults</b>	<b>33</b>
Alejandro Okret	
<b>Modern (Jewish) Family</b>	<b>35</b>
Daniel Olson	
<b>“Peoplehood” and the Millennials: Reciprocity of Recognition, Responsibility and Contribution</b>	<b>37</b>
Zohar Raviv	



## Feed the Soil, Not the Plants

**Rebecca Bloomfield**

*"When a flower doesn't bloom, you fix the environment in which the flower grows, not the flower." - Alexander Den Heijer*

It wasn't exactly how I'd always pictured my time under the "*chuppah*".

Yes, I was dressed up, and we were surrounded by a sea of smiling faces, but we were also in a barnyard, and among the sea of people were goats in costume. I was cradling a bundle of perfectly-braided, just-baked challot in my arms like a baby. To my left was a Rabbi. To my right was an Adamah farmer, her arms overflowing with green leaves of varying shades, shapes, and tastes, but with bright colors poking out here and there, as if a painter had desired a little something extra.

This wasn't your average first-fruits & costumed-goats parade.

At Isabella Freedman, home to the Adamah Jewish Farming Fellowship, we were celebrating Shavuot, the parade being a culmination of a three day festival of prayer, learning, and receiving.

Growing up a Jew who attended Sunday school and Hebrew school, I don't think I ever learned about Shavuot, or if I did it certainly never involved anything outside the synagogue walls (let alone radishes and goats). In addition to the Hebrew alphabet and Jewish traditions, I did learn other things within the synagogue walls: I learned that I could be told what to believe by someone above me, and I learned Jewish customs & rituals by rote. I have since discovered and rediscovered Adamah, where this still life painting of Judaism - its holidays, rituals, and tensions - comes to life.

As organic farmers, we feed the soil - not the plants: we use cover crops to amend and protect the soil, we rotate the placement of our crops from one season to the next, and we regularly add homegrown compost to our soil. All of these practices cultivate a soil texture and nutrient level from which our plants can then thrive. This foundational farming practice has proven to be sustainable - requiring little to no external inputs or short-term fixes.

---

**Similarly, for millennials to sustain an authentic connection to Judaism, we have to help create a nourishing environment, from which they can thrive, rather than feeding them prescriptions about how to be a good Jews, or imbuing them from the outside with a sense of obligation**

---

Similarly, for millennials to sustain an authentic connection to Judaism, we have to help create a nourishing environment, from which they can thrive, rather than feeding them prescriptions about how to be a good Jews, or imbuing them from the outside with a sense of obligation. In Adamah - through a unique combination of farming, leadership training, and Jewish learning—we provide experiences for fellows not only to connect to their inner purpose and spirituality, *but to go through this process with others who are doing the same*. We rise before the sun, chanting prayers together with tunes that stir the soul and demand repetition. It is from that authentic connection to self and others that their sense of peoplehood is developed and sustained.

Adamah bookends the past ten years of my life. On one end I was a fellow in the program, and on this end the Associate Director. It's not the farming or the Judaism that boomeranged me back to Adamah; it's the community. The community goes beyond the other fellows that I shared three intimate months with in 2005; it extends to every single other stranger, acquaintance, and friend who has been an Adamah fellow over the years. The connection created by the experience of farming, praying, singing, laughing, compromising, opening, experimenting, and learning with others in this context is palpable and otherwise indescribable. It runs deep. It is family, it is Jewish, and it is peoplehood.

Since being an Adamah fellow in the Fall of 2005, Rebecca Bloomfield's values of good food, strong community, and the connection to something-greater has brought her back to Hazon's Adamah Fellowship as the Associate Director.



# The Dialogue of Jewish Peoplehood: Millennial Children of Inter-marriage<sup>1</sup>

**Fern Chertok and David Mittelberg**

Jewish Peoplehood is the subjective claim of belonging and commitment to the local and global Jewish collective and captures the extent to which this connection is a defining element in one's sense of self. It is also important to keep in mind that Jewish Peoplehood is not fixed or impervious, but instead, like a dialogue, it is influenced by interactions with and experience of the communal environment. There is no group with which to better see the potential for and importance of the Jewish Peoplehood dialogue than young adult children of intermarriage

Children of intermarriage in the millennial generation, born between 1981 and 1995, are more likely than their older counterparts to identify as Jewish in young adulthood (Pew Research Center, 2013). Millennial children of intermarriage, also represent half of their generation of Jews. We have used interview and survey data collected as part of a large-scale study of millennial young adults<sup>2</sup> to explore the Jewish Peoplehood dialogue between children of intermarriage and the Jewish community.

Jewish formal and informal education reaffirms collective identity, builds the reservoir of shared memories and provides, in microcosm, the experience of Jewish community. Unfortunately, the typical child of intermarriage lacks these childhood experiences. For many, not becoming a bar or bat mitzvah is emblematic of their sense of being outsiders to the experience of being part of the Jewish community. As one young man expressed it; "I've kind of missed out on the whole bar mitzvah thing. Everybody I've ever known has had one and I didn't."

---

1 An earlier draft of this piece was presented at the "Wrestling with Jewish Peoplehood" conference, April 10-11, 2016.

2 For full details of the study see Sasson, T., Saxe, S., Chertok, F., Shain, M., Hecht, S., & Wright, G. (2015). *Millennial children of intermarriage: Touchpoints and trajectories of Jewish engagement*. Waltham, MA: Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies, Brandeis University.



We reanalyzed survey data using four empirically derived dimensions of Jewish Peoplehood: *collective belonging*—identification with the Jewish people; *personal responsibility*—commitment to the welfare of other Jews; *connection to other Jews*—the desire to have personal Jewish networks; and *Jewish capital*—the possession of cultural knowledge and skills.

On all four of these dimensions, children of intermarriage without childhood Jewish education rate themselves lower than peers from with two Jewish parents or peers from intermarried homes with a history of Jewish education.

Many children of intermarriage enter young adulthood claiming a connection to the Jewish collective but feel that it rests on a limited foundation. However, experiences during young adulthood, such as Birthright Israel, can restart the Jewish Peoplehood dialogue. Young adult programs provide many of the Jewish Peoplehood experiences that children of intermarriage missed including connection to a peer group with whom to build shared memories. Being accepted to participate in Birthright, for many, represents formal validation of their claimed sense of connection to the Jewish people. As one young adult put it, “The first thing they say when you get off the plane is ‘welcome home.’ I left there feeling like these are my people.” With the exception of Jewish capital, participation in Birthright increased all dimensions of Jewish Peoplehood

The takeaway is that the Jewish Peoplehood dialogue of children of intermarriage can be prematurely truncated and diminished through the absence of childhood experiences. But, perhaps most importantly, it can also be restarted and recharged in young adulthood.

---

**the Jewish Peoplehood dialogue of children of intermarriage can be prematurely truncated and diminished through the absence of childhood experiences. But, perhaps most importantly, it can also be restarted and recharged in young adulthood.**

---

Fern Chertok is a Research Scientist at the Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies at Brandeis University. David Mittelberg is Chair of the Steering Committee, International School, Associate Professor for Sociology on the Faculty of Graduate Studies and former Chair of the Department of Sociology at Oranim. Together Fern and David conduct research on the measurement of transnational Jewish Peoplehood and its development in youth and young adults.



## Reweaving Jewish Community

**Beth Cousens**

This is a personal story, but it's not about me.

I grew up in a thick Jewish community. On any first days—of school, of camp, of youth group—when I would come home and tell my mother who I met, she would inevitably suggest that I knew them already from JCC Mother-Toddler or preschool or kindergarten religious school. When I went out to dinner during college breaks I could count on seeing someone I knew from camp or youth group. There was always a Hanukah Roll special on the board at the sushi restaurant. There were three grocery stores any of us shopped in for Passover and the pre-seder reunions in the store aisles were as important as the seders themselves.

These communities still exist. At the same time, a variety of forces—the housing market, intermarriage, globalism, sheer economic opportunity—have pushed more Jews than ever away from thick community. Our bonding capital, Robert Putnam might say, is lessening. The experiences that bring us together are slipping away.

I'm evidence of that. I live now in Bavel, in San Francisco, a place that has rich Jewish opportunity but little thick community. My son sees no Jewy Jews on the street, not even Jews walking to shul on Yom Kippur. There's no sushi named for our holidays. The challah tastes funny, when we can get it. He will become close buddies with non-Jews at his Jewish pre-school. None of that is bad, but the Jewishness is not palpable.

What I've learned from leading Federations in Millennial engagement (Boston, Detroit, Northeastern New York, Chicago, Vancouver, Los Angeles, among others) is that reweaving Jewish community is possible. It takes anchors and architects—educators and other professionals who are paid to do this work, volunteers on an outreach team. It takes all of us acting as Malcom Gladwell's connectors, "bringing the world together," getting over the awkwardness of introductions to make them, constantly, making sure that at any Jewish event—I'm making this up, any metric will do—we make ten new introductions. It takes our having event after event that builds new micro-communities, bringing small groups of people together for deep conversation, scheduling a get-to-

know-you coffee with a recent college graduate and bringing another recent graduate along, inviting a few newly married couples of mixed religious backgrounds for Shabbat dinner and giving them lifelong friendships (as well as a group of peers that can support decision-making about Jewish life). It takes an emphasis on relationships, on quality, not quantity.

And what I've learned is that Millennials care; they're open to engaging, maybe even eager to engage. With these connections, they see people they know in synagogue on Rosh Hashanah. They read the Jewish newspaper, looking to recognize names. The grocery store and the mall become Jewish experiences. They begin to feel at home, a sense of belonging. They come to know Jewish community in their kishkas.

Feelings of belonging are intangible but they aren't without cause. That is, we can't touch them, but we can influence them, literally tying North American Jews back together. We probably won't all learn Yiddish or revert to Philip Roth's Newark, but we can know each other. Maybe that's all we need.

Dr. Beth Cousens is the Associate Vice President of the Jewish Federations of North America

---

**What I've learned from leading Federations in Millennial engagement (Boston, Detroit, Northeastern New York, Chicago, Vancouver, Los Angeles, among others) is that reweaving Jewish community is possible. It takes anchors and architects—educators and other professionals who are paid to do this work, volunteers on an outreach team.**

---



## Jewish Peoplehood: From Value to Action

**Sarah Eisenman**

It all comes down to *the problem*.

In many ways, the Jewish community has defined *the problem* of engaging millennials as young people themselves. We are obsessed with getting them involved and through the door.

If instead we related to them as *the solution*, not just by having them “show up” for our events, but by sharing with them the essential challenges of our people—challenges they can help us overcome—we might be closer to futureproofing Jewish life. Their talents and vantage points are perfectly matched to complex issues rising from a new era in Jewish life.

At JDC Entwine, we’re catalyzing a rising generation of Jews to see global Jewish responsibility as a cornerstone of their identity. Having built a growing platform connecting with 15,000 young people to date, we’ve discovered three key truths:

**Jewish Service is How to Build Jewish Peoplehood** – Young people want to volunteer and have direct impact. We want them to see that Jewish peoplehood is not just a value, but an action. Service combines them and demonstrates first-hand the power of Jewish mutual responsibility.

By taking part in immersive service programs, stretching beyond their comfort zone, and learning about the Jewish values that underpin volunteerism, these young people move beyond the individual, feeling the impact of being part of a collective bigger than any one of us. All of a sudden participating in Jewish life becomes about being part of a solution to real-world problems.

**Seen and Not Heard, No More** – Ninety-eight percent of our alumni return home more committed to the Jewish people and eager to engage in their local community. More compelling, over a third of trip applicants had no current Jewish involvement. Clearly, service programs are inspirational, creating a new wonderment for the Jewish people.

But what comes next?

Bring them aboard; integrate them into our leadership structures, and not just as observers.

We have to acknowledge that young leaders in the Jewish community are often in a perpetual cycle of training, not necessarily placed in the central leadership roles they are capable to take on.

We must put them at the table and provide them a critical mass within the leadership body of the organization. This can be challenging given minimum giving requirements, but we cannot let that get in the way.

This year, after changing our organizational by-laws, JDC, a large, legacy Jewish group, will welcome fifteen young adults in their 20's and 30's on to our Board of Directors. All, but one, are alumni of Entwine's service programs and they will put their commitment to global Jewish responsibility to work.

**We need to calm our Jewish particularism nerves**— In building a young adult movement centered on global Jewish responsibility, we weren't sure if this generation cared about Jewish life or an organization largely supporting other Jews. Maybe this notion was passé?

We found something very different. By and large, they do care about uniquely Jewish issues, just as much as universal ones. But two facts proved essential: first, they know far less about specifically Jewish concerns, so a major investment in "knowing" is critical. And two, they care deeply for other Jews but not at the exclusion of others.

So if we want to foster Jewish peoplehood among them, we need to support their commitment to their people *and* the wider world. If we wish to foster a commitment to the Jewish people, we must lead with the unique and special responsibility that Jews have to other Jews. Lead with it—do not shy away or qualify—yet do not criticize their

dedication to other people. And instead, help them frame this Jewishly too. With more than 3,000 young Jewish adults volunteering globally through our programs, and more to come, we have learned you can do both.

So let's tell them clearly: the Jewish people do have a unique responsibility to each other *and* yes, our tradition calls for us to care for humanity. There is nothing wrong with that, and surely there is room and need for both.

Start there, put Jewish responsibility into action, and before you know it, they have found their people, and not just themselves.

**Sarah Eisenman is the Executive Director of JDC Entwine and JDC Assistant Executive Vice President.**

---

**We found something very different. By and large, they do care about uniquely Jewish issues, just as much as universal ones. But two facts proved essential: first, they know far less about specifically Jewish concerns, so a major investment in “knowing” is critical. And two, they care deeply for other Jews but not at the exclusion of others.**

---



# Engaging with Jewish Millennials about Peoplehood

**Liz Fisher**

What does it take to engage Jewish Millennials with Peoplehood? Let's start by changing the question. Let's reframe the topic to: Engaging with Jewish Millennials about Peoplehood. Instead of creating a divide and thinking about what it takes "us" to engage "them" with Peoplehood, let's embrace them as part of the Jewish People and engage *with* them in a collective conversation about Peoplehood.

On this premise, I reached out to Repair the World fellows, who are in their 20s and spending a year of their lives engaging peers in volunteerism, Jewish learning, and social impact.

Here's what a few of them said:

The concept of Jewish Peoplehood resonates with me very much. For me my Jewish identity has been less to do about religion or a belief in G-d but more about a connection to a people and global community that have lasted for thousands of years. *Ariel Wexler, Repair the World Fellow, Pittsburgh*

As a millennial growing up in a secular American-Jewish, or Jewish-American society... it is hard for me to accept the notion of the term "Jewish Peoplehood." To me, "Jewish Peoplehood" is a term to keep the Jewish population united. It seems as if it is a belief that the Jewish people are similar, whether culturally, religiously, or through kinship. Personally, I only semi-subscribe to this concept. While I do believe it is crucial for people to be part of a community and great things can come from unity, to me, it is more important to not alienate one group of people as a "Peoplehood." *Andrew Davidov, Repair the World Fellow, NYC*

The phrase "Jewish Peoplehood" feels kind of foreign and centralized to me. It is not part of my jargon that I use relating to Judaism and Jewish nonprofits. I think that part of it is because I love the diversity of Jewish experience, and that it can mean so many different things to different people. *Sam Sittenfeld, Repair the World Team Leader, NYC*

---

**Young American Jews: 1) they are not monolithic. What feels embracing to one, feels alienating to another; 2) they feel connected to Judaism as something larger than themselves and are proud to be Jewish; yet, 3) they hold deeply universalist values and multiple identities... In other words, Peoplehood, yes, but not only.**

---

These responses were not surprising, as they reflect much of what we at Repair the World understand about young American Jews: 1) they are not monolithic. What feels embracing to one, feels alienating to another; 2) they feel connected to Judaism as something larger than themselves and are proud to be Jewish; yet, 3) they hold deeply universalist values and multiple identities. That understanding was reinforced in a recent independent evaluation of Repair the World's Communities programs, which engaged 12,000 people in the first two years. Of those 12,000, 75% were young Jewish adults, and 70% of those had a "low Jewish engagement background." The top reasons why they engaged in Communities' volunteer experiences? To address a problem and help others (97%); the opportunity to meet like-minded people (77%) and the opportunity for a genuine encounter with people from different backgrounds (77%). In other words, Peoplehood, yes, but not only. Millennials want community AND they want to meet people from outside their community.

An interesting note about these responses is that they came within minutes of me sending an email with this inquiry - a signal perhaps of these individuals' eagerness to be part of this conversation. We should welcome them and their peers into this conversation by first stopping with the "how do we engage them" question. Let's pledge, instead, to include people under the age of 30 in our planning, on our Boards, and as part of our professional teams. Because if we want to understand how better to share the values of Peoplehood, we just need to ask. Jewish millennials are, after all, part of this People too.

**Liz Fisher is the Chief Operating Officer of Repair the World**





## Using Our SMARTs to Engage Jewish Millennials

**No'a Gorlin**

In her article, "Stop Googling. Let's Talk" (*The New York Times*, 26/09/15), Professor Sherry Turkle points to evidence that technology's ubiquitous presence in our lives today has led, among other phenomena, to a decreased ability among people to converse meaningfully. The result: two individuals meet for a face-to-face meeting, but only touch on subjects that can handle frequent interruptions. "They don't feel as invested in each other."

How does this affect the internalization of Jewish Peoplehood among millennials? In my experience working with young Jewish leaders around the world, I have learned that none of us are strangers to the fact that in today's over-stimulated world, we need to consciously designate specific time slots for work, exercise, family, volunteering and culture. Finding the extra time and mind space to explore the abstract notions of "Jewishness," "Jewish Peoplehood," or how one connects to these personally is an even greater challenge.

The problem is clear. But what is the solution?

Successful young leaders demonstrate that the solution lies in learning to make Jewish exploration fit within the jigsaw puzzle of today's carefully crafted lives. Taking the tried-and-true SMART model from the professional world, this simple acronym may be the key to working with the millennial generation as it navigates its Jewish connection.

**Specific.** Break down the intangible objective of "connecting to the Jewish people" into tangible tasks. Rather than putting out a general call to create a more relevant Jewish community, challenge your audience to create their own Passover Seder that their friends would enjoy.

**Measurable.** One needs only to glance at a smartphone to understand that today's leaders like to see immediate, measurable results. Why not frame Jewish engagement similarly? Build touchpoints to Jewish life and community as increments that can be reached, achieved and checked off with confidence. Took part in a community service day? Check. Understand the meaning behind Tu B'Shvat? Check. Hosted a Shabbat dinner? Check.

**Attainable.** We are all part of a generation of achievers and are motivated by a sense of purpose and the promise of progress. Therefore, we can expect our connection to the Jewish world to follow a similar pattern. We must shift our thinking from an all-or-nothing approach, and instead internalize the notion that connecting to one element of Jewish community at a time is not only possible, but can be seen as progress. If you are an environmental activist who feels connected to the Jewish community through the lens of Jewish environmental texts, you're off to a great start – and, for some, *Dayeinu*.

**Relevant.** Whether you are a scientist, a painter, an LGBTQ activist or all of the above, it should not be impossible to find opportunities to explore your Jewish connection in settings that jive with your diverse worldviews and interests. Are you passionate about human rights? Attend a panel discussion with leaders from the top Jewish human rights advocacy organizations. Are you a devoted chef? Join a cooking workshop and learn how to fuse traditional Jewish foods with current culinary trends. We must learn – and demonstrate – that our Jewish identities and our other identities can interact in meaningful ways.

**Timely.** The rabbis of the Talmud made a case for setting aside regular times for studying Torah (Pirkei Avot 1:15), lest it fall off of our to-do lists. This principle is no less relevant today: a call to become more generally involved in the Jewish community is much more difficult to answer than a call to attend this year's Purim celebration. Opportunities to participate in Jewish communal life should be time-specific and time-bound to fit with the jam-packed and highly structured agendas that are so common today.

---

**Successful young leaders demonstrate that the solution lies in learning to make Jewish exploration fit within the jigsaw puzzle of today's carefully crafted lives. Taking the tried-and-true SMART model from the professional world, this simple acronym may be the key to working with the millennial generation as it navigates its Jewish connection.**

---

Over the past few years, ROI Community and the Charles and Lynn Schusterman Family Foundation have created tools for millennials to create grassroots experiences for themselves and their peers to connect Jewishly in fun, relevant and meaningful ways. Shabbat and holiday celebrations have proven to be particularly effective starting points for millennials to connect to the Jewish narrative in a Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant and Timely way.

There is a Jewish adage that explains that even more than the Jews have kept Shabbat, Shabbat has kept the Jews. This ancient custom of weekly “pauses” has helped the Jewish people maintain a sense of peoplehood throughout the generations. In our case, I see “Shabbat” not only as the traditional, weekly Sabbath, but as the metaphor for taking a pause from the daily grind of the digital era to connect to one’s family, one’s community and one’s Jewishness, in order to explore the more abstract notion of Jewish Peoplehood. This understanding should guide us as we explore ways to engage Jewish millennials with Jewish Peoplehood: create “pauses” – from Birthright trips to Jewish values-based conversations at the Friday night dinner table – that young people can relate to due to their 21st century relevance and their SMART design. In so doing, millennials will connect to their Jewish roots, and they will lead by example, ensuring Jewish continuity for generations to come.

**No’a Gorlin is the Associate Executive Director of ROI Community, an international network of activists and change makers who are redefining Jewish engagement for a new generation of global citizens. ROI Community is an initiative of the Charles and Lynn Schusterman Family Foundation.**



## Giving Circles: Philanthropy as Peoplehood

**Felicia Herman and Jackie Fishman**

To be honest, in our work at The Natan Fund, a giving circle made up of New York-based professionals in their 20s-50s, we seldom if ever think in terms of “Millennials” or other generational monikers. Rather than read studies and craft programs reflecting their conclusions, we simply listen to people and build programs around their goals, needs and aspirations.

The most important contemporary trend that our Millennial and other members ascribe to is the ability to be as empowered in their giving as they are in so many other aspects of their lives. In today’s DIY culture, where people are accustomed to being “producers” rather than “consumers” of their life experiences, many people also want a hands-on role in their giving. Rather than send a check to a faceless institution, or sit at a friend’s table at another gala dinner, they want a more transparent giving experience that they customize and control. Witness the success of DonorsChoose, Kiva, GiveDirectly, where the giver has 100% control over the allocation of his or her contributions.

Giving circles - groups of people who pool their charitable resources and decide together how to give those resources away - provide this experience of empowered giving to their members, with the added bonus of collaborative learning and action. Giving circles inspired by Jewish values, like Natan and the dozens that are part of Amplifier: The Jewish Giving Circle Movement, are living and breathing manifestations of Jewish Peoplehood. Importantly, as the Amplifier network demonstrates, Natan is just one flavor of giving circle. The model itself is infinitely customizable, and thus the opportunities to utilize giving circles as a tool for building Jewish Peoplehood through philanthropy are endless.

Let us briefly focus on just two of the core ways that giving circles build a sense of Jewish Peoplehood.

*First, a Jewish giving circle is a community inspired by Jewish values.* Members build relationships, networks, and a sense of collective belonging between themselves, their grant applicants and recipients, the people their grants ultimately reach, and

even other funding bodies. Natan members, for example, come together to review applications, interview applicants, and make grants - as well as for regular events with other philanthropists, Jewish and Israeli leaders, and grant recipients; for occasional holiday celebrations; and for an annual Israel trip, which now includes a visit to another global Jewish community as well. The infinite customizability of the giving circle model enables any type of community to emerge: one created top-down through an institution or bottom-up through members; around any age demographic and even multi-generational; in any geographic location or even virtual; and as broadly inclusive as the group wants it to be (members don't even have to be Jewish!).

*Second, a giving circle can decide to support any element of Jewish civilization with its grants.* For example, Natan's grants support nonprofit organizations that create new access points to Jewish life and that support economic development and urban renewal in Israel. One grant committee focuses on North America, another globally; another on initiatives for Russian-Speaking Jews; another partners with the ROI Community to support its Jewish innovators around the world - and so forth. Reviewing grant applications from hundreds of organizations working to address issues facing Jews

---

**We don't pretend to have exhaustive answers about the desires of Millennials, nor do we claim that the type of person who affiliates with Natan is broadly representative of their peers. Instead, we want to suggest that the giving circle model offers an ideal formula for engaging Millennials and any generation in compelling conversations, meaningful experiences, and the ability to make change in the world through empowered, intentional philanthropy.**

---

around the world is an unparalleled experiential education in Jewish Peoplehood. From independent spiritual communities to new media initiatives to outdoor education to social businesses supporting Israel's weakest populations, Natan supports inclusive, inspiring, effective organizations that embody Jewish pluralism and deepen the richness of Jewish civilization.

One overwhelming theme emerges from our conversations with Natan members., Whatever their official generational designation, giving circle members want the same things that previous generations have wanted: a connection to something larger than themselves, meaning, community, opportunities for great conversations, and a role in shaping the present and the future. They want to collaborate in networks to achieve these goals. And in an open marketplace where they have access to just about anything, they expect Jewish experiences and programs to be as high-quality, smart, and professional as any other activity. We don't pretend to have exhaustive answers about the desires of Millennials, nor do we claim that the type of person who affiliates with Natan is broadly representative of their peers. Instead, we want to suggest that the giving circle model offers an ideal formula for engaging Millennials and any generation in compelling conversations, meaningful experiences, and the ability to make change in the world through empowered, intentional philanthropy.

**Felicia Herman is the Executive Director of Natan, a Jewish giving circle based in New York.**

**Jackie Fishman is the Assistant Director of Natan, and has been with Natan since 2009**



## Peoplehood: What Have You Done for Me Lately?

**James Jacobson-Maisels**

Young Jews have switched the center of their Jewish lives from the focus on identity in earlier generations to a focus on purpose and meaning. This can be seen in the fact that, as the Synagogue 3000 study reports, “For Jews, younger adults are more spiritual and more religious than their elders.”<sup>1</sup> The authors continue:

These patterns are remarkable not just because they run counter to the general patterns among non-Jewish Americans, where old out-score young, but also to the patterns for Jewish identity among American Jews discovered elsewhere (see, for example, *Uncoupled* by Steven M. Cohen and Ari Y. Kelman). In virtually all recent research on American Jews, we find that on most measures of behavior and belonging, younger Jews trail older ones. That is, younger Jews report lower levels of Jewish association (marriage, friends, neighbors), Jewish affiliation (organizations, synagogues, federations, etc.), and Jewish ritual practice (e.g., observance of holidays).<sup>2</sup> The exception is Jewish spirituality.

Young Jews are unwilling to affiliate or to care about the Jewish People simply from a sense of belonging. For them to care about the Jewish People, they need to understand why the Jewish People should matter to them. They need to understand how their participation in Jewish life can be meaningful, powerful and transformative. This is not only born out by the data but is my experience in over a decade of teaching Jewish spirituality to students at Or Halev: A Center for Jewish Spirituality, The Pardes Institute of Jewish Studies, Yeshivat Hadar and other institutions.

While a sense of ethnic identification may have sufficed for earlier generations, millennials demand that we show them what Judaism has to offer on their quest for meaning, purpose, self-realization and connection. Their path to care about the Jewish people is through being part of concrete communities of practice that allow them to experience how Judaism can be powerful for them. They will need to live out the potent ways of living and being that Judaism has to offer, that will make them feel part of

---

1 S3K Report, March 2009, p. 10.

2 Ibid.

this project called “Jewish peoplehood.” This is why immersive experiences, such as those provided on meditation retreats or prolonged beit midrash study, are so crucial. They must be given a way to integrate their everyday life and experience into their Jewish lives. Their passion, connection and commitment will not come from assumed identification and belonging, it will no longer be primarily ethnic or tribal, but will come from a sense of purpose and vision, of being part of a life and world transforming practice. This is the reason, I believe, that both spirituality and social action/tikkun olam are becoming increasingly popular and important to young Jews’ Jewish lives and identity. They both provide young Jews with a sense of purpose and mission, a vision that Judaism offers of what it means to be a person in the world, and a meaningful way to live out that purpose.

If we want young Jews to care about Jewish peoplehood, we have to show them that being part of this project is meaningful, purposeful and vital. We need to show them how it can transform their lives and the lives of those around them. We have to provide them with concrete modes of spiritual practice that speak to their passions and needs and help them to find a home in their tradition that will engender a passionate

---

**If we want young Jews to care about Jewish peoplehood, we have to show them why they should, why being part of this project of the Jewish people is meaningful, purposeful and vital. We need to show them how it can transform their lives and the lives of those around them. We have to provide them with concrete modes of spiritual practice and world healing that speak to their passions and needs and help them to find a home in their tradition that will engender a passionate commitment to that home and its preservation.**

---



commitment to that home and its preservation. Or HaLev gives our participants a taste of this passion on our mediation retreats. Through deep practice, we create a space where we can touch the fullness of our humanity while grounding ourselves in Jewish tradition. It is immersive experiences like these that engage millennials in the project of Jewish peoplehood.

**Rabbi Dr. James Jacobson-Maisels is the founder of Or HaLev: A Center for Jewish Spirituality and Meditation (<http://orhalev.org/>) He teaches Jewish thought, mysticism, spiritual practices and meditation at the Pardes Institute of Jewish Studies, Haifa University and Yeshivat Hadar.**



## Engaging with Empathy

**Aaron Katler and Taylor Epstein**

Robert Hunter, lyricist for the Grateful Dead, wrote in the 1970's, "The wheel is turning and you can't slow down, You can't let go and you can't hold on, You can't go back and you can't stand still, If the thunder don't get you then the lightning will. Won't you try just a little bit harder, couldn't you try just a little bit more?"

When it comes to engaging the young adult community, many Jewish organizations find themselves in a bind not too dissimilar to Hunter's. We're trying harder, trying just a bit more, but the work of responding to the needs of an ever-evolving community leave many feeling left behind - like we're on a turning wheel that won't slow down. We're steeped in the "challenge" narrative of young adult engagement: The challenge of cutting through today's clutter and noise; the *perceived* entitlement of younger generations; the challenge of asking people who identify as global citizens to stand up for a more particularist identity, one that can feel asynchronous with the rest of their lives.

And...we need to subscribe to a different approach, one of immense opportunity: How might we capture the imagination of - and learn from - the modern Jewish customer? At UpStart, we have an idea of what that looks like from over 10 years of using empathy for our user to drive our designs. The opportunity of exploring this question, if embraced, enables the integration of people's Jewish and secular worldviews to inform a passionate Jewish future.

### **Design for the User**

The drive to engage young adults has fostered creative but often overlapping and redundant efforts that fail to speak to the true needs and desires of our community members. To truly appeal to young adults, and increasingly all ages, we need to partner with the consumers *before* we take our ideas to market. Embracing the DIY and collaborative culture that animates millennials, we can empower institutions with the process of human-centered design, how to co-create a new or adapted initiative. The beauty of the process is in the results - a product or service that the target user had self-identified wanting to consume. As part of this collaborative culture, institutions, funders, and producers must: Validate the ideas of young adults and recognize new ways of designing solutions to their problems; Help translate their questioning into agency; Foster innovation by bridging the gap between "those who create" and "those who participate".

---

**To truly appeal to young adults, and increasingly all ages, we need to partner with the consumers before we take our ideas to market. Embracing the DIY and collaborative culture that animates millennials, we can empower institutions with the process of human-centered design, how to co-create a new or adapted initiative. The beauty of the process is in the results – a product or service that the target user had self-identified wanting to consume.**

---

#### **Let Go of the Ownership Mentality**

We live in an increasingly ownerless society. From Burning Man to Uber and iTunes, “renting” experiences, products, and services is the societal norm - people jump in and out of product relationships according to their needs. Research shows that our brains’ understanding of belonging is literally being rewired, making it that much more difficult to navigate between the world of borrowing and renting, to one where you need to commit or “belong” to a communal institution let alone the greater community. It’s time for a radical shift in the way we approach the definition of belonging. It’s no longer about collecting and owning people’s affinities. It’s no longer about being a “member”, but being a “co-designer”.

We rely on and expect the current young adult consumer of Jewish life to carry on the values of Jewish Peoplehood. In order to do so, we are collectively responsible to adapt our ways of defining, delivering, and living those values. This consumer is more discerning, and it does a great a disservice to force their ideals into our construct. Rather, how might we take take their worldview, and use it to enhance how Jewish values are experienced? We need to do a better job of seeing the individual as a person with value to add to our Peoplehood, not the other way around.

**Aaron Katler is the CEO at UpStart.**

**Taylor Epstein is the Director of Design Strategy at UpStart.**

**Based in San Francisco, UpStart partners with innovators to redesign the experience and expression of Jewish life.**



## Peoplehood: Millennials and Tikkun Olam

**Maytal Kuperard**

“How to engage Millennials” is like asking “How to engage Europeans”. Just because Millennials were born in a certain era doesn’t mean we are all the same. No one would think to say that there is a single way to engage all Europeans just because we are from the same continent. The truth about Millennials is that we are so varied that sometimes I think it’s hard to have a conversation on the subject. To develop a sense of how to engage with this group requires noting that we span time, age and socioeconomic situation. So while I cannot generalise about Millennials, perhaps I can provide a few insights that describe my own take on engaging with Jewish Peoplehood based on my experience.

I work for an organisation that seeks to inspire positive social change in the British Jewish community and I have been working for similar organisations for much of my career. So I function within an environment where the Tikkun Olam conversation is lived out on a daily basis. For others, Millennial or otherwise, it may be a very novel thing. From my particular perspective, what I see is that Millennial Jews in London today operate in a complex, multi-cultural and globalised environment. When we partake in public and private acts of *chesed* and *tzedeq*, we want to do so proudly as Jews. It is very much integral to forming the fabric of our Jewish identity and informs our relationship to the concept of Peoplehood.

As part of an aging community (yes, young people ‘age’ too), Millennials have grown up riding the wave of globalised culture (drowning?), we are accessing information (overload?) like no generation before us and there is of course the social media revolution (devolution?). Whilst there has never been a shortage of causes to get involved in, today, potential causes are a lot easier to access and a lot harder to ignore.

Jewish Peoplehood is elemental in a globalised world for Jews like me. It’s how we anchor our identity, and define ourselves apart amidst a generation overwhelmed with worldwide integration. For us, Jewish Peoplehood is not a distraction from universal justice. We *do* “Peoplehood” when we commit to universal justice, voluntary service and acts of *chesed* whether inside or outside of our community. It’s how we locate

---

**Jewish Peoplehood is elemental in a globalised world for Jews like me. It's how we anchor our identity, and define ourselves apart amidst a generation overwhelmed with worldwide integration. For us, Jewish Peoplehood is not a distraction from universal justice. We do "Peoplehood" when we commit to universal justice, voluntary service and acts of chesed whether inside or outside of our community. It's how we locate ourselves within the minority amongst other minorities.**

---

ourselves within the minority amongst other minorities. It's that particular feeling we are greeted with when acknowledging the part the Jewish community is playing in seeking to provide refuge for unaccompanied Syrian minors in London today.

So what does it take to engage us Millennials?

It takes a level of acceptance that our multifarious conceptions of Jewish Peoplehood belong within the facets of today's Judaism. For some, our identity is comprised of practising *Tzedek*. It affirms our connection to our Jewish history and it is important that this experience is acknowledged as authentic by our community. There will be those Millennials who disagree with me and find other ways to express their Jewish identity. That is as it should be. A loud and vital Judaism for Millennials will be one broad enough to contain all its many voices. But I spend my energy creating environments to attract Millennials who, like me, already engage with the betterment of the world we live in.

**Maytal Kuperard is Head of Communications and Community Outreach at JHub. JHub provides support to individuals and non-profit organisations that promote positive Jewish identity and social change in the UK Jewish community and beyond.**



# Self and System: The Case for Adaptive Leadership in Advancing Global Jewish Interconnectivity<sup>1</sup>

**Sarah Mali**

This summer, The Jewish Agency's Global Leadership Institute (GLI) is launching the **Adaptive Leadership Lab** which brings together young professionals from around the world to make progress on local and global Jewish challenges in an adaptive learning environment.

At the GLI, we equip young adults with the mindset and skillset to exercise leadership in increasingly unstable, complex and interconnected environments, in service to the Jewish people. Since its establishment in 2013, the GLI has employed the model of Adaptive Leadership as its primary training approach. In this short piece we will briefly introduce Adaptive Leadership and its relevance to developing global interconnectivity among young Jewish adults<sup>2</sup>.

Adaptive Leadership is a practical leadership model pioneered at the Harvard Kennedy School by Ronald Heifetz, Marty Linsky and their colleagues. The theory posits that leadership and authority are two separate concepts that we often conflate. People in positions of authority are those we usually call 'leaders', because they provide us with direction and preserve order. But leadership is about behavior, what we do to create change – and can be performed with or without authority. Those who are engaged in the work of leadership look to identify adaptive challenges, challenges for which there is no ready-made technical answer, which cannot be solved by an expert and must be solved by the stakeholders who are experiencing the challenge themselves. Adaptive change is uncomfortable because it challenges our most ingrained beliefs and suggests that deeply held values are losing relevance. Those who exercise adaptive leadership are engaged in the 'practice of mobilizing people to tackle tough challenges and thrive<sup>3</sup>'.

---

1 We see Peoplehood as the state of being interconnected with other Jews.

2 GLI programs train young adults aged 18-35.

3 Ronald Heifetz Et Al, (2009). The Practice of Adaptive Leadership, pg.14.

At the GLI we see the value of adaptive leadership in the context of building a stronger Jewish People. Here are four reasons why:

**1. Adaptive Leadership Develops a Stakeholder Mindset:**

The model advances a distributive approach to responsibility. When it comes to adaptive challenges, we are all complicit in the messes in which we find ourselves and as such, we, collectively, are the only ones who can make progress on these challenges. Adaptive Leadership trains participants to re-pattern themselves to be part of an open playing ground of the Jewish People; where making change is all of our responsibility.

**2. Adaptive Leadership Democratizes Leadership:**

Since leadership is behavioral, it follows that each of us has the capacity to mobilize people to make progress on the issues we face. The adaptive learning experience does not 'seduce' participants by naming them as ready-made 'leaders;' but calls upon them to exercise their leadership muscles by facing tough issues, flagging power dynamics that are off-balance, and sharing the workload collaboratively. Everybody is able to do this. By democratizing leadership the model suggests powerfully that the adaptive challenges faced by the Jewish world cannot be resolved exclusively by people in positions of formal power and influence.

**3. Adaptive Leadership Transforms the Group Learning Experience:**

When leadership is defined as observable behavior, the classroom becomes alive with the actions of those exercising leadership and those avoiding the work with which leadership compels them to engage. Class time is neither a simulation nor an intellectual exercise. It is a visceral, below-the-neck experience – a laboratory - which provides a means for participants to learn leadership through their own practice in the here-and-now. The group laboratory experience with demographic diversity / global composition allows the group to function as a mini-Jewish People laboratory. Together, diverse challenges and opportunities are surfaced and grappled with, as the group undergoes an intense discovery process of the power and productivity of its inter-connectedness.

**4. Adaptive Leadership pushes us beyond our Independent Selves to Inter-dependence:**

Core to the adaptive theory is the adult development perspective that postulates that we have the potential to develop increasingly complex levels of understanding of ourselves and the world in which we live, to broaden our behavioral repertoire, and to widen our inclusion of those who are different from us. Adaptive Leadership challenges participants to let go of seeing themselves as islands of knowledge and culture but rather as interconnected pieces of a complex system. It builds a more systemic awareness that

**Adaptive Leadership challenges participants to let go of seeing themselves as islands of knowledge and culture but rather as interconnected pieces of a complex system. It builds a more systemic awareness that incorporates difference and the possibility of holding opposing and oftentimes surprising and enriching viewpoints. Participants learn to see themselves as a part of a Jewish system; part of the Jewish People.**

---

incorporates difference and the possibility of holding opposing and oftentimes surprising and enriching viewpoints. Participants learn to see themselves as a part of a Jewish system; part of the Jewish People.

Adaptive Leadership is rooted in an understanding that each of us can exercise leadership, that our selves are interconnected parts of a wider system and, as such, we all have a stake in each other's growth and in the kinds of Jewish world we would like to cultivate.

**Sarah Mali is the Founding Director of the Global Leadership Institute. For more information about the GLI and the Adaptive Leadership Lab (A.L.L.) please contact [sarahm@jafi.org](mailto:sarahm@jafi.org)**





## Engaging Jewish Young Adults

**Alejandro Okret**

I am not worried. I am almost certain I am not worried.

In reading about sustainability and how we humans react to the term and relate to it pragmatically, I started to think about the Jewish community. To make a long story short, I'll cut to the chase and focus on young adults, fashionably called "Millennials".

Through my job at Moishe House, out of the London office, I am very lucky to interact on a daily basis with Jewish young adults as close as Argentina and as far as New Zealand. I learn from them, adapt and update my *weltanschauung*. A Pew Research Center report from 2012 titled, "Nones on the rise", highlighted how Millennials are less religiously affiliated than ever before; however, in my opinion, this in no way means less communally engaged. A reevaluation of beliefs and practices is central to emerging adulthood. The traditions and communal customs used by previous generations have certainly morphed, but not the eagerness to participate and activate.

The lack of a communal space that positively engages young adults has meant that this cohort has looked elsewhere, as described in a recent publication from the Harvard Business Review, "How we gather." That 'elsewhere' has often been with their peers in informal settings. Young adults in the Jewish community are increasingly resorting to peer-built communities. This is their time to experiment, and most importantly, to fail. Failure carries a huge burden, but it embodies great potential for success and empowerment. I want to see young adults assume responsibilities and show us the way. At the end of the day, they are the next generation of communal leaders and it is now when they need to be given the opportunity to earn the trust from the Jewish community. However, is the Jewish community ready to give them that trust?

At Moishe House, we pride ourselves for acknowledging that our residents, the Jewish young adults creating meaningful Jewish programming for their peers across the world, are the real specialists. We are there to support and help them, but they are the doers and innovators.

In Europe, where I am based, anti-Semitism is growing and the sense of building resilient communities is increasingly urgent. I could not imagine partnering with a better core of individuals. Young adults are flocking in by the tens of thousands to participate, create vibrant and invigorating communities, and assume their role in their Jewish communities. All we need to do is adapt our mindset and learn to meet them at their junctions, where they know what works for them and not what adults tell them will work for them.

I am not worried. As long as we keep investing in Jewish young adults and let them lead, I am not worried.

Alejandro Okret is Moishe House Chief Global Officer and a member of the ROI community

---

**In Europe... young adults are flocking in by the tens of thousands to participate, create vibrant and invigorating communities, and assume their role in their Jewish communities. All we need to do is adapt our mindset and learn to meet them at their junctions, where they know what works for them and not what adults tell them will work for them.**

---



## Modern (Jewish) Family

**Daniel Olson**

When I was growing up, my mom sang in a Klezmer band called “The Prairie Heym Klezmorim”. As is apparent from its name, the repertoire referenced the experience of being Jewish in Minnesota. One of my mom’s favorite songs to perform was a version of the Yiddish classic “Roumania,” a nostalgic song describing the virtues of the homeland. At the end, she added a “Minnesota” version, full of homages to lutefisk, long underwear, and Jewish Olsons.

Being Jewish in Minnesota provided me many opportunities to share my traditions with others. I imagine these discussions are common to anyone practicing a minority religion. The one question people had that sometimes caught me off guard, however, was, “How could anybody be a Jewish Olson?”

Perhaps this question discomfited me because it made me doubt the authenticity of my personal identity. After all, half of my family is not Jewish. Some of my ancestors immigrated to the US not from countries like Romania, but from countries like Sweden. My paternal grandfather was a minister. My dad became Jewish only during his 20s.

Like many other Jewish millennials who have grown up in families from diverse backgrounds, I have grown comfortable with both components of my personal identity and see how they strengthen each other. An experience I had singing with the Yale Glee Club in Sweden brought home how the two sides of my family’s religious background were both within me. At the Uppsala Cathedral, the choir enters in a procession with a cross and six candles at the front, a custom incompatible with Judaism. Our director gave us the option of not participating in the march and just sitting in place. I had to decide whether I wanted to be involved in a church service in this seemingly official capacity. I figured that my Swedish ancestors would have appreciated a descendant participating in a service at the Uppsala Cathedral and decided to march.

Though it may seem as if I put my Judaism aside during this service, I actually came out of the experience with a stronger Jewish identity. Listening to prayers sung in a different language made me proud of the prayers that I know how to sing in a different language

and of the connection I feel to Hebrew liturgy. About a week later, the Glee Club visited Prague. Our time there happened to coincide with Shavuot. I called the rabbi of the community and made a reservation for the yontiff dinner and *Tikkun Leil Shavuot* along with a few friends, including a Mormon who was interested in seeing contemporary Jewish life in 21st century Europe. My friends and I were invited to return for services the following morning. We came back and many of us were asked to participate in the service. I read the Haftarah, Ezekiel's strange vision of the *Merkavah*. I saw this experience as connecting to Jewish Peoplehood in a more conventional way than the Swedish service, but I must say that having the chance to participate in both crystallized the experience of being a Jewish Olson.

Daniel Olson is a PhD student in Education and Jewish Studies at NYU interested in better understanding how Jewish educational organizations create inclusive learning opportunities for all.

---

**Like many other Jewish millennials who have grown up in families from diverse backgrounds, I have grown comfortable with both components of my personal identity and see how they strengthen each other.**

---



## “Peoplehood” and the Millennials: Reciprocity of Recognition, Responsibility and Contribution

**Zohar Raviv**

The continuous infusion of the term “Peoplehood” within Jewish discourse, alongside the desire to harness it within the particular socio-cultural context of millennials, requires greater thought in order to unpack its future treatment, application and ramifications. Assuming that one of the objectives of this term is the creation of a strongly-felt sense of *collectiveness* among Jews worldwide, “Peoplehood” can become a central concept to rethink and restructure old paradigms that have informed our intercommunal associations for decades. This involves the combination of creative conceptual work with the willingness to reconstruct institutional agents whose current implementation does not bring to light the fuller potential of such an objective.

One chief challenge facing any introduction of the term “Jewish Peoplehood” is the profound ignorance that still exists within both Israeli and world Jewry regarding the richness, vitality, diversity and the splendid contribution each community potentially has to offer the other{s). As an Israeli educator who has been professionally immersed and educated in multiple settings worldwide, I can attest firsthand to the great advantages in thoughtfully standardizing infrastructures that may allow each community better exposure to, and influence on the others. While there are surely multiple venues to explore this paradigm, I’d like to offer as a tangible example the longstanding institution of *shlichut* (שליחות emissary).

*Shlichut*, in its various forms, is a long practice in the Jewish world, reflecting the view of Israel as a central and essential player in maintaining Jewish cohesion and ongoing vitality. From this vantage point, Israel is not only the historical *source* of the complex Jewish narrative, but also an indispensable *resource* to edify, sustain and perpetuate such narratives on behalf of world Jewry. Notwithstanding the simplification of this concept here — and the considerable modifications made in past decades to the *shlichut* institution - the platform that perceives *shlichim* as a one-sided (and obviously self-gratifying) service of Israel to world Jewry has not changed.

---

**The socio-cultural climate of millennials, which is arguably informed by a heightened sense of self-worth and belief in its ability to affect positive change, offers a platform wherein reciprocal *shlichut* initiatives can become a persuasive meridian in our quest for deeper intercommunal Jewish dialogue, and a major forerunner in fostering a deeper sense of collectiveness through mutual exposure, understanding and appreciation.**

---

In the two occasions where I served as an *Education Shaliach* (in North America and South Africa), I was at first eager to “show Israel and Judaism in their fuller colors and enchanting complexity”, only to be much humbled later by discovering the no less intricate, diverse and vital Jewish landscapes in which I was immersed – and of which I had no prior grasp. This insight has convincingly highlighted for me the need to offer such opportunities in a reciprocal fashion, as part of a broad intercommunal Jewish network.

The socio-cultural climate of millennials, which is arguably informed by a heightened sense of self-worth and belief in its ability to affect positive change, offers a platform wherein *reciprocal shlichut initiatives* can become a persuasive meridian in our quest for deeper intercommunal Jewish dialogue, and a major forerunner in fostering a deeper sense of collectiveness through mutual exposure, understanding and appreciation. The reality wherein Israel continues to send its best representatives on *shlichut* can only benefit from opening its gates to an equally willful cadre of committed Jews from various communities worldwide who become immersed for 1-2 years in different settings of Israeli society.

The potential benefits of such a paradigm shift are arguably considerable, and only serve as one example of the needed rethinking toward a broader vision for Jewish Peoplehood – for millennials and beyond.

**Dr. Zohar Raviv is the International VP of Education for Taglit-Birthright Israel**