

The background of the entire page is a collage of blue-toned images. It features various shapes and textures, including what appears to be torn paper, overlapping leaves, and abstract organic forms. The colors range from light, airy blues to deep, dark navy blues, creating a layered and textured effect.

# The Peoplehood Papers **25**

May 2019 | Nisan 5779

## **Towards a Peoplehood Based 21<sup>st</sup> Century Zionism**



# Z3™ Project

## The Conversation

### CONTINUES...

**September 15, 2019** | Phoenix, AZ

**November 10, 2019** | Palo Alto, CA

**January 26, 2020** | Los Angeles, CA

**April 5, 2020** | St. Louis, MO

Our **vision** is a future in which **Israel-World Jewry relations** are predicated on a notion of **Jewish peoplehood, mutuality** and **shared destiny**.

Through conferences, conversations and coalition building, the **Z3 Project** aims to promote the evolution of **Zionist ideology** to its next phase, **Zionism 3.0™**.



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## **The Peoplehood Papers 25**

May 2019 | Nisan 5779

# **Towards a Peoplehood Based 21<sup>st</sup> Century Zionism**

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# From the Editor

In December of 2018 a unique gathering took place at the Palo Alto JCC. Some 100 leaders and activists from the U.S and Israel gathered under the auspices of **Zionism 3.0** and **Zionism 21** to discuss 21<sup>st</sup> Century Zionism. The following core principles were introduced:

- **Peoplehood is the binding formative ideal of World Jewry and Israel.**
- **Israel is the state where the entire Jewish People exercises its right to self-determination.**
- **Israel and World Jewry are two centers equal in their significance for Jewish destiny.**
- **A vibrant Diaspora is a Zionist imperative.**
- **Z3 and Z21 are cross-partisan ideas and movements, encompassing the full diversity of Jewish life and expression.**

We decided to dedicate Peoplehood Papers 25 as a platform for broadening and deepening the conversation on the Zionism of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Some of the questions we have hoped to explore were:

1. **Z21 and Z3** are being created and taking shape against a background of a crisis between American Jewry and Israel. While the above "corrections" represent a constructive approach, will they resonate with young Jews, on both sides of the ocean, who are for the most part not interested in these issues? Is there room to include additional principles that will reinvigorate the Zionist enterprise and inspire young Jews?
2. To frame a vibrant Diaspora as a Zionist imperative is to come full circle back from the early Zionist intent. How will Israelis view it? Will it impact the centrality of Israel? What will be the more practical implications of this dramatic shift in perspective?
3. Framing peoplehood as the binding formative ideal of Israel presents the State as ultimately an instrument of the people. Do Israelis see it that way? Can they see it that way?

4. Do either Israelis or world Jews see Israel and World Jewry as two centers equal in their significance for the Jewish destiny? What are the implications of this statement to the way decisions are being made regarding the future of the Jewish people? Where should the conversation on the future Jewish destiny take place? Should institutions or platforms that address these issues be created?
5. Furthermore, if the two centers are equal in their significance for the Jewish destiny, how do we address the growing gap between them?
6. What will it take in educational terms to make Israelis gain a new appreciation for the cultural creativity of Jews throughout the world?
7. If **Z21** and **Z3** succeed, what will the Jewish world look like?

This diverse collection of articles opens the scope of the conversation. It addresses both conceptual, ideological and practical issues. All writers seem both aware of the complex challenges Zionism faces in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and share concerns for the Jewish future. Maybe the strongest and most hopeful message they send is that we need to actively engage the People in the conversation and in dialogue. That both the Peoplehood and Zionist conversations should be crowd sourced. That charting our course in the 21<sup>st</sup> century should become both a collective project and process.

Israel's 71<sup>st</sup> Anniversary is both an opportunity to celebrate and to envision its future. What does a peoplehood-based Zionism of the 21<sup>st</sup> century look like, and how do we respond to the challenges of the times?

I want to thank our article contributors for advancing the conversation, the Oshman Family JCC that launched **Z3**, the Reut Institute that initiated **Z21** and Taube Philanthropies for supporting this publication.

Shlomi Ravid

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# Looking to 2048 – The 21<sup>st</sup> Century Imperative for the Jewish People

**Sanford Antignas**

*Looking back to 1948....*

To ensure the future of the Jewish People, *the 20<sup>th</sup> Century imperative for the Jewish People was the Zionist project*: to create and build a strong, secure and thriving Jewish and democratic sovereign state in the land of Israel. Israel emerged as “the project of the Jewish people”. As the events of the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century unfolded, a broad consensus formed among Jews everywhere – across the spectrum – of *the existential “need” for a state for the Jewish People*.

In 1948 our forebearers could not have dreamed that in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century the Jewish People would have two strong, secure and thriving centers of Jewish life in Israel and North America. Jews in both places played important roles in making both a reality.

*Looking ahead to 2048....*

Success brings its own challenges: By 2048 Israel’s population could double to more than 15 million, making Israel one of the most densely populated countries in the world. This portends new challenges for Israel and the Jewish People as a whole. Ironically this could challenge the once unimaginable: that Israel may not, in theory, be able to be the physical home of the entire Jewish people (if all desired). An increasing number of Israelis - for reasons having to do with quality of life, economic and other reasons - may seek to temporarily or permanently live outside of Israel (just as other peoples do - French, Koreans, Poles, Swedes, etc.). At the same time, Jews outside of Israel are likely to continue to increasingly migrate and concentrate in major cities, particularly those in North America. Jews are on the move, as they have been throughout history.

What does increased migration, mobility of Israeli and World Jewry mean for the Jewish People?

To ensure the future of Jews as a people, *the 21<sup>st</sup> century imperative for the Jewish People is the Jewish Peoplehood project*: To ensure (i) a non-geographically contingent

sense of Jewish identity and belonging to the Jewish People and (ii) there are strong, thriving, diverse and connected centers of Jewish life around the world that Jews will want to be an active part of, in some measure. Adapting our communities (in and outside of Israel) and the Jewish People - Jewish Peoplehood - to the 21<sup>st</sup> century is *the existential "need" of the Jewish People today.*

Israeli and World Jewry have a collective interest and responsibility in this Jewish Peoplehood endeavor. They need to ensure that (i) Israel and North America continue to develop as strong, thriving and diverse large centers of Jewish life (along with multiple smaller centers around the world), that (ii) they are in a positive relationship with each other, as distant cousins who support each other in ideas, projects, exchanges, time of need, etc. and that (iii) there is a basis that brings us all together, connects us on some level as a collective across communities. This is a necessity for the future of each community and for the Jewish People as a global collective.

The two largest pillars of the Jewish People, Israeli and North American Jewry, have a special responsibility to not only continue to evolve and adapt in their own context, but to do so in a manner that strengthens and furthers the notion of being part of the Jewish People more broadly.

Meeting these challenges gives focus to the work that must take place by Israelis in Israel, World Jewry in their communities and by all of us together:

Israeli Jewry needs to continue to come to grips with and accommodate their reality and future trends, as well as those of World Jewry. This requires (i) striving to fulfill the aspirations of Israel's founding as a Jewish and democratic state and (ii) evolving Zionism so it reflects and accommodates the world and Jewish life in the 21<sup>st</sup> century based on the principles articulated by the Z21/Z3 December 2018 Palo Alto Conference<sup>1</sup>. Israelis must develop their sense of the Jewish People and their part in it, as well as their own sense of Jewish identity in this context. It is important for Israeli Jews to enhance their own sense of identity and capacity to be in an authentic relationship with World Jewry, and to ensure that Israelis who might migrate temporarily or permanently (and their children) have the identity foundation and tools to be part of Jewish life and remain part of the Jewish People should they live outside of Israel.

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1 a) Peoplehood is the binding formative ideal of World Jewry and Israel, b) Israel is the state where the entire Jewish People exercises its right to self-determination, c) Israel and World Jewry are two centers equal in their significance for Jewish destiny, d) A vibrant World Jewry is a Zionist imperative, e) Zionism reflects cross-partisan ideas and movements, encompassing the full diversity of Jewish life and expression.

*World Jewry...* (albeit primarily North American Jewry) needs to continue to come to grips with and accommodate their reality and future trends, as well as those of Israel. This includes positively adapting the nature and raison d'etre of Jewish identity, Jewish life, and community to the environments in which they live. They must confidently accommodate the inevitably continuing growing numbers of inter-faith relationships and their families into their communities, as well as contextualizing in present-day terms being in an authentic relationship with Israel and Israeli Jewry. All this while simultaneously actualizing their identity as citizens of the countries in which they live, along with facing the challenges and threats affecting their Jewish and broader community.

*Together...* “*Kol yisrael arevim zeh lazeh*” – “*All Jews are responsible for each other*” remains as relevant as ever. As Jews in Israel and North America played important roles in making each other’s success a reality since 1948, they need to do the same going forward and work together to ensure our joint future as a People. This needs to be grounded in Jews having authentic, realistic understandings of and connections with Jews in other communities. All must recognize and respect the equality and legitimacy of Jewish communities, however defined, in their diversity and wherever they may be (in and outside of Israel). There is no central authority of the Jewish People. Accordingly, whenever possible, communities should avoid taking actions that may have detrimental effects on the other, on the Jewish People as a whole, or on large portions of it - such as on matters relating to defining who is a Jew and legitimate Jewish practice.

**Israeli and World Jewry have a collective interest in and responsibility for the success of the 21<sup>st</sup> century Jewish Peoplehood project. This will ensure that Jews wherever they are, whether they move to Israel, from Israel or across world communities, will want to be and can be part of the Jewish People.**

**We are a people of ongoing adaptation. Looking to 2048, adapting our communities (in and outside of Israel) and the nature of the Jewish People to the 21<sup>st</sup> century is the adaptation of our time. We are all in this together.**

**Sanford Antignas is a lay leader at UJA-Federation of New York. For more than 20 years he has focused on issues related to Israel, World Jewry, Jewish Peoplehood and the relationship between Israeli and North American Jewry.**



# Creative Secular Judaism: The most interesting Israeli-American Project of our Time

**Tova Birnbaum**

When I was 19 years old, I went to the United States for the first time. I was a young woman who grew up in a very religious community in Israel - the Ultra-Orthodox community of B'nei B'rak. I grew up in a very religiously observant environment; but I believe that my personal Jewish journey actually began only on that day. It was on that day when I began working as a teacher at an Orthodox Jewish high school in Los Angeles. The exposure to a religious community very different from the one I grew up in, completely changed my world. And as if this were not enough: exposure to other American Jewish denominations - Conservative and Reform Judaisms, for example - I couldn't believe the breadth of the Jewish experience.

The most striking discovery for me was that the phrase "Jewish creativity" is not an oxymoron. It is possible to exercise judgment, critical thinking and endless imagination in order to reconcile the changing world reality with our ancient Jewish culture - a synthesis of the world of modern values and a beloved heritage.

The discourse that has developed in recent years about Jewish Peoplehood is especially important in regards to its focus on the relationship between Israel and American Jewry. The framing of two centers of equal value, each adding its unique contribution to Global Judaism, is beneficial and useful. At the same time, within this conversation, one of the most important thinkers who deeply influenced the shaping of my personal worldview - Ahad Ha'am - is constantly present.

In the early days of the Zionist movement, Asher Ginsberg - Ahad Ha'am - tried to advocate for an idea that was hard to listen to during times of persecution and pogroms against the Jews in Eastern Europe. He spoke of "the problem of Judaism" and not of "the problem of Jews". This was not an acceptable polemic in times of great insecurity for the Jewish people in Europe. Nonetheless, in his view, the Land of Israel as a Jewish cultural national center that invests economic and human capital in cultivating relevant

tools and invites world Jewry to develop its identity and practical cultural structures, was no less important than the diplomatic and economic efforts to establish a physical home for the Jewish people in the Land of Israel.

Inspired by Ahad Ha'am, who encouraged us to talk about "Judaism" and not only about "the Jews", I too would like to turn the spotlight toward the magnificent potential of the Israeli-American encounter around cultural creativity and the re-exploration of tradition. My encounter as a young Israeli woman with American Judaism made me dedicate my life to the examination and creation of a relevant Jewish spiritual and values-based lifestyle. Over the years, I found secular Judaism in Israel as a place where I felt at home. Now, that my life is centered in America again, I find that an authentic and intentional encounter between Israeli Judaism and American Judaism is the most interesting and promising project of our time.

In a slightly simplistic but useful way, one might say that Israelis bring to the table secular Judaism and American Jews bring Jewish creativity. Every day in my daily work at the Palo Alto JCC, I witness a fascinating encounter between Israeli secular Judaism and American creative Judaism. The unique community in Silicon Valley enables a deep encounter in which both sides devote themselves to joint explorative work and experimentation. American Jews, on the one hand, are used to expressing their Judaism in a religious language and to practicing their Judaism in a religious way. But I have found that in reality, many of these American Jews do not seek God and do not feel that the existing religious institutions meet their spiritual needs. They ARE used to integrating creativity, art, individualism, and intellectual activity into their Jewish world. Secular Israelis, on the other hand, do not regard God as a significant component of the ritual and the narrative. For Israelis, the cultural act itself is the center of the matter, and Americans are still figuring out how to incorporate this attitude into a robust Jewish diasporic existence.

**When Israelis and Americans meet in my community to learn together, to create meaningful rituals or to explore the meaning of community for them, I witness a magnificent process. A very creative religion-based Judaism meets secular language-based Judaism. This is not a new Jewish denomination; we are in a post-denominational era; it is a Judaism that examines our true needs, as individuals and as a collective, and strives to create structures that are not necessarily religious - that are God-optional - which draw from the essence of our heritage and culture and that touch our hearts and minds. Shabbat and holiday rituals, text study which is deep and meaningful and sustainable social justice projects – these are just the tip of the iceberg for this important and fascinating process.**

When discussing 21st century Zionism and contemporary Jewish peoplehood, there is a new point of encounter: Judaism. Judaism is the new creation that emerges from deep international cultural connection and exchange between the two epi-centers of Judaism. I am grateful for being able to contribute my small part in this historic process and invite the readers to join me in this journey, from either side of this beautiful tango dance.

**Tova Birnbaum is the Director of Jewish Content at the Oshman Family JCC in Palo Alto and one of the founders of Bina Secular Yeshiva in Israel. She also served as the World Zionist Organization Central Emissary for North America.**



## Zionism 3.0: Transcending our Differences

**Zack Bodner**

All of a sudden, there seems to be no hotter topic than “the divisions between Israel and American Jewry”. Articles have been published in scholarly journals and in the mainstream press, books are being written, conferences are being held and coalitions are being built. This is good news, since it means the issue is becoming a priority for many within the Jewish establishment. But an undue focus on our divisions is obscuring and obstructing work on the infinitely more important question: “What can Israel and American Jewry learn from our differences in order to build a secure, vibrant and pluralistic Jewish future?”

As we see it, the problem is two-fold. First, too many North American Jews define their relationship with Israel exclusively by what they disapprove of, namely with “the occupation” and the Chief Rabbinate. This means that their engagement with nearly half of their fellow Jews in the world is reduced to wagging their fingers at the Jewish State. Meanwhile, too many Israelis dismiss American Jews as irrelevant. They don’t understand why our support is vital to Israel’s security, they don’t see what we contribute to the future of Jewish life, and some believe we won’t even be Jewish in a generation due to assimilation or anti-Semitism.

In any relationship, if the bulk of your interactions are critical, over time the relationship will not be able to withstand the weight of the negativity. Partners who only perceive one another’s faults are neither seeing nor affirming each other’s value. According to [the latest studies](#) on relationships, for every one criticism the partners must share five compliments for the relationship to last. We can apply this same notion to the relationship between Israeli and American Jewry.

**This is ultimately a problem of focusing too much attention on what divides us, and not enough on what unites us – which is why it is time for Zionism to evolve to its third phase, Zionism 3.0, in which we transcend our differences.**

## Introducing Zionism 3.0

Why 3.0? Because Zionism 1.0 was the pre-1948 Zionism of the pioneers like Theodore Herzl. It was based on the notion that we need our own state to be safe from anti-Semitism and persecution.

Zionism 2.0 was the Zionism of the builders, like David Ben Gurion. It was the Zionism of building a nation and it was characterized by the “rich American uncle” notion, meaning that those in the Diaspora who had the money, but didn’t have the chutzpah to make *aliyah*, had to support those who did because the new, young struggling State of Israel needed Diaspora resources to exist. It was also the Zionism of “Diaspora negation” – meaning that it was built on the notion that the Jewish future would lie only in Israel, and that once Israel was strong enough to accept and sustain all Jews, the Diaspora would fade away. Thus, it was the Zionism of Diaspora Jewry having a stake without a say.

Destiny has its own path, however, which is why Zionism 3.0 - or Z3 for short, is the next phase of the Zionist movement. It reflects this unique moment, when for the first time ever in Jewish history, there is both a strong, sovereign Jewish Homeland and a strong, flourishing Jewish Diaspora. These two major centers of Jewish life (Israel and North America) are both thriving, and are both making transformative contributions to the Jewish future.

For example, in Israel, the Jewish people have resurrected Hebrew as a modern language and are using a Jewish calendar to define its weeks, months and years. Revolutionary Jewish art and technology is emerging out of Israel, and Israeli organizations like IsraAid are saving lives around the world – truly being a light unto the nations.

Meanwhile, innovative and authentic Jewish practices abound in North America. The creation of new Jewish rituals, putting our Jewish texts online to democratize text study, and the proliferation of cultural Shabbat dinner celebrations are a few examples of innovative American Jews finding new ways to make Jewish life meaningful today and to extend the vocabulary of Jewish expression.

These two major centers of Jewish life are blossoming, and we must create a new paradigm for how we engage with each other – a way that transcends our political and religious differences so we can work together to elevate each other and share the wonders that each has accomplished.

Jews in both places add to the other – not just when it comes to security, but with each other’s spiritual and cultural contributions as well. Not only are we so much better

together, but we will be much worse off if we can't stick together. If American Jews stop supporting Israel, it is a national security risk to Israel; and a weakened Israel is catastrophic for World Jewry.

This is why we should not let political frameworks or religious differences dictate the nature of our relationship. Our shared sense of Peoplehood and our shared Jewish destiny must frame our relationship.

### **Unity, Not Uniformity**

This is about unity, not uniformity. We will not iron out all our differences, nor should we strive for that. Our people have been divided since the very beginning – since Jacob and Esau. Even Rabbis Hillel and Shammai argued over every halachic decision. During our darkest hour, during the Shoah, Jewish partisan fighters disagreed with Jewish councils in the ghetto over how best to save Jewish lives. When the modern State of Israel was being reborn, American Jews who did not support the creation of the State argued mercilessly with those who did. And even the underground Jewish armies that fought for the liberation of Israel battled with each other.

But if Ben Gurion and Jabotinsky could come together despite their enormous differences, so can we. Ben Gurion once wrote to Jabotinsky saying, "...whatever may happen in Zionism in the future, my hand will always be extended to you in times of friendship and stress in spite of all party opposition". To which Jabotinsky replied, "I grasp your hand in true friendship".

Throughout our history, we have remained brothers and sisters. That is the familial relationship that should guide us. Sibling relations are even stronger than marriage: you can't divorce your sibling. Yes, you can fight with each other, but siblings will always share a common destiny and a common legacy.

If we are to share one destiny, we must find a new way to engage with each other, and like all relationships, it starts with listening to each other.

### **Scaling the Z3 Conversation**

For the last four years, the Oshman Family JCC in Palo Alto has hosted the Z3 Conference, a major gathering founded on the ideology of Zionism 3.0, with a unique commitment to three organizing principles.

First, we bring together the left and the right, the orthodox and the secular and those who will not publicly criticize Israel along with those who will, to openly discuss Israel – World Jewry relations.

Second, we bring Israeli and Diaspora Jews together to have this conversation, so we are not each just talking to ourselves. Together, we are talking *tachlis* about how each can better recognize what the other half contributes to the Jewish future.

Finally, we don't just focus on what divides us. We highlight what unites us: our shared legacy, our shared destiny and our shared sense of Peoplehood.

We have found that this formula works. We now livestream our conference all over the world. The international press is writing about it. Over 1,100 attendees came to Silicon Valley for the event this past year – including hundreds of Israelis. Now Jewish institutions all over the country are asking us to help them replicate this program. They tell us that Israel is a “toxic issue” in their community and they want help restarting these conversations.

As we work together, the Z3 Project aims to build a movement of like-minded people who share the belief that we need a new Zionist paradigm that transcends our differences. In America, we want people to have this conversation all over the country: in JCCs, synagogues, and Hillels, yes, but also in homes and at Shabbat dinner tables. We are partnering with outstanding organizations that share our belief that we can create a new way for how Israel and World Jewry engage with each other.

Meanwhile in Israel, we have partners who are shifting the way Israeli Jews see American Jewry, working on how the system educates about Diaspora Jewry, and working on policy changes in Israel. There is real work happening on the ground in Israel and we want to amplify their efforts.

Israel and the Diaspora have two separate dreidels: the Diaspora “Sham” is the Israeli “Po”. If that doesn't embody the gaps between us perfectly then I don't know what does! But the symbol of Z3 is a new 5-sided dreidel that has the letters representing the words “Ness Gadol Haya Sham V'Po” – a great miracle happened here AND there – because Z3 insists that Jewish Peoplehood is thriving in both places.

Indeed, great miracles are happening here and there. Let's celebrate them together.

**Zack Bodner is the CEO of the OFJCC in Palo Alto, home of the Zionism 3.0 Conference and the Z3 Project. Zack has spent 25 years working on America-Israel relations in the worlds of politics, academia and community organizing.**



## Peoplehood in the Pews

**Amitai Fraiman**

Every Shabbat, the “Prayer for the Welfare of the State of Israel” is recited in thousands of synagogues around the Jewish world. Composed in September of 1948 by the Chief Rabbis of Israel, this beautiful piece of liturgy reflects both an appreciation for the miraculous events of that year as well as an expression of hope for an even better future. In addition to praising G-d and the State, there are two additional components to the prayer. The first is an exclamation of the redemptive nature of the birth of the modern Jewish State. The second, which is an essential element of traditional messianic themes, is the explicit articulation of the ingathering of the exiles - also known as Diaspora negation. It is clear why rabbis, alive during the founding of a state rising from the ashes of the Holocaust, would use miraculous language to describe what they had lived through. It is also clear why they chose the language they did to describe the ingathering of the exiles. The authors witnessed a massive influx of immigrants to Israel, and imagining a reality of total elimination of Jewish life outside of Israel was no longer a fantasy. It is evident that this prayer, like many others, is both a vehicle for a relationship with the Creator and a reflection of values and a particular belief system.

Although some have chosen to revise the prayer, it remains foundational in the religious Zionist movement, and it is clear why it is recited in Israel. Interestingly, although this prayer became closely associated with religious Zionism, it is recited in synagogues around the world. It has become a beautiful way for those living outside of Israel to express a deep belief in the Zionist project and the support of world Jewry for Israel and its inhabitants. It is a sign of solidarity rarely seen in our Jewish community.

Even though this prayer is a reflection of deeply held beliefs in Zionism, one cannot ignore the shifts this ideology is undergoing. Indeed, over time, the idea of Diaspora negation has been eroded. That is not to say that it has been eliminated from the Zionist canon, but that it is no longer its driving force. While Diaspora negation has been at the heart of the Zionist ideology (from both religious and secular perspectives), it no longer carries the same weight it used to. More and more Israelis are choosing to live outside of Israel, and in terms of immigration rates, the waves of immigration seen as

late as the '90s are no longer happening. In fact, the last major Jewish concentrations outside of Israel are showing no signs of mass immigration. The role of JAFI is no longer described as immigration promotion. Moreover, research shows that the attitudes of Israelis towards Jews outside of Israel have also changed. According to the 2016 Pew study, for the first time in Israel's history, nearly 70% of Israeli Jews believe that a thriving Jewish Diaspora is necessary. And 47% of Israelis now believe that Israelis should feel free to build a life anywhere in the world, versus only 46% who believe Jews should remain in Israel. A far cry from Rabin's infamous description of Israeli emigres as a "winnowing of the weaklings". In short, the sentiment conveyed in the prayer of Diaspora negation is no longer a dominant element of our communal ideology.

While the above most likely does not reflect a significant theological shift, but just an erosion, we still must ask ourselves what it means. Now that we no longer disparage Jewish life outside of Israel, is it time to take a more positive approach toward it?

**What is our responsibility towards our brothers and sisters living outside of Israel? If, as the latest Ruderman Foundation research shows, 95% of Israelis believe the relationship with those living outside of Israel is of paramount importance, how might we convey that in our liturgy? How do we signal that they matter in a way that does not discredit their communal integrity? How do we relate to them in a way that does not view them as potential *olim* and part of a fulfillment of a belief system to which they might not subscribe? In other words, if Jews outside of Israel pray for the welfare of the state of Israel, should not Israelis pray for the welfare of Jews living elsewhere? Should we not respond to their display of solidarity with our own?**

Jews in Melbourne, Brooklyn, Jerusalem, and Marseilles recite this prayer to demonstrate their solidarity with Israel and its people. It is unique because it is said weekly, regardless of current events, and affirms that their support for Israel is unconditional and unceasing. The issue is that there is no parallel prayer recited in which we, as a collective, convey our solidarity with our brethren living outside of Israel. The theme of Diaspora negation, so pronounced in our liturgy as well as in our core beliefs, has prevented us from vocalizing an appreciation of life outside of Israel. Our history has led us to this moment in time, and our failure to recognize the vitality of life outside of Israel seems ungrateful. However, if we view this prayer as a sign of solidarity and not only a reflection of our hopes and values, then we can perhaps consider another approach. That is, if we believe in the importance of the unity of our people and the role we all play in the unfolding story of the Jewish people, we must adopt liturgy that reflects that direction. We live in an unprecedented time in which we have two strong and vital centers of world Jewry, and until we resolve the theological ramifications of this reality, we need to do what we

can to keep the different parts of our people connected. We need to do so in all realms of our life - public and private, cultural as well as liturgical. We need to do so in order to continue the conversation.

As part of the conversation, I offer a prayer I wrote after the Pittsburgh attack, which I believe is a step in the right direction.

#### תכילה לשלום התכוצה היהודית/ אמתי פריימן

אָבִינוּ שְׁבַשְׁמִים, צוּר יִשְׂרָאֵל וְגוֹאֲלוֹ, בְּרַךְ אֶת אַחֵינוּ בְּנֵי עַמְךָ הַנְּתוּנִים בְּכָל אֲרָצוֹת תְּבֵל. הֲגוּ עֲלֵיהֶם בְּאַבְרַת חֲסֵדָךְ וּפְרֹשׁ עֲלֵיהֶם סֶכֶת שְׁלוֹמְךָ. הַעֲמֵד תְּשׁוּעָה מִן הַשָּׁמַיִם, וְתֵן לָהֶם בְּטַחָוֹן, בְּרִיאּוֹת, שְׂגִשְׁגוּ לְמַעַן יִזְכוּ לְהַעֲמִיד בְּנִים וּבְנֵי בָנִים שֶׁל מְבַקְשֵׁי פָּנֶיךָ. וְעַד בּוֹא מְשִׁיחַ צְדָקָה חִזְקָה אֶת מַגְנֵי שְׁלוֹם אֲרָצוֹתֵיהֶם, בְּזָכוֹת אֶהְרֶן כְּהֵנָּה קִדְיָשָׁא, אוֹהֵב שְׁלוֹם וְרוֹדֵף שְׁלוֹם. תֵּן בֵּינָה לְכָל מְמַשְׁלוֹת אֲרָצוֹתֵיהֶם לַעֲשׂוֹת טוֹב עִם כָּל הָעַמִּים, עִם כָּל יִשְׂרָאֵל וְעִם קְהֵלוֹת בְּנֵי עַמְךָ אֲשֶׁר בְּאַרְצָם. כִּי בְשְׁלוֹמָם יִהְיֶה לָהֶם שְׁלוֹם. וְיִקְרָם בָּהֶם הַכְּתוּב: מִי אֱלֹהֵי קָעֵב תַּעֲוִפִּינָה וְכִיוֹנִים אֶל אֲרֻבְתֵיהֶם. כִּי לִי אֵיִים יִקְווּ לְהִבְיֵא בְּנֵיךָ מִרְחוֹק לְשֵׁם יי אֱלֹהֶיךָ וְלִקְדוּשׁ יִשְׂרָאֵל כִּי פִאֲרָךְ. יְהִי רָצוֹן שְׁנֹזֶכֶה לְחַזוֹת בְּגֹאֲלַת עַמְךָ בְּמַהְרָה בְּיָמֵינוּ אָמֵן סְלָה.

#### A Prayer for the Welfare of Diaspora Jewry/ Amitai Fraiman

Our Father in Heaven, Rock, and Redeemer of the People of Israel: Bless our brothers and sisters, your people, dispersed throughout all lands. Shield them with your love, spread over them the shelter of Your peace. Bestow upon them heavenly salvation, grant them security, health, and prosperity so that they may raise generations who seek out Your presence. Until the coming of redemption, strengthen the hands of their defenders in the merit of the high priest Aaron, lover and pursuer of peace. Grant wisdom to their leaders so that they extend goodness to all nations, the children of Israel and their local Jewish communities, for our peace is bound up in theirs. Fulfill for them the verse: Who are these that float like a cloud, like doves to their nests? The coastlands await me to bring your sons from afar, for the name of the LORD your God, For the Holy One of Israel, who has glorified you. May it be Your will that we merit to see the redemption of Your people, speedily in our days, Amen Selah.

Amitai Fraiman is an Israeli/American Rabbi and entrepreneur. He is the founder of אִשְׁוּוּר/Interwoven, and the director of Z3. A Jewish Peoplehood enthusiast.



# When You Say: “a Peoplehood Based Zionism” What Do You Mean by Peoplehood?

**Talia Gorodess**

## **Introduction: Two Perspectives**

A core principle of the Z21 movement states that “Peoplehood is the binding formative ideal of World Jewry and Israel”. But what does this mean? The phrase “Jewish Peoplehood” is interpreted as a notion that all Jews are somehow connected to one another. However, the phrase did not gain widespread public recognition or support in Israel, nor in its professional and academic circles.

Two leading Jewish intellectuals, Mordecai Kaplan and Ben Halpern, who attempted to explain the relevance of Zionism to the American Jewish public and its significance to the Jewish people as a whole, may also assist the Z21 movement in its effort to understand and ultimately popularize the concept of Jewish Peoplehood.

This article offers a rough sketch of two important perspectives on Jewish Peoplehood, as laid out by Kaplan and Halpern. The inspiration for choosing these two thinkers came from Ofer Shiff's illuminating essay<sup>1</sup> about early American Zionist responses to the Israeli demand for *Aliyah*, with Kaplan and Halpern at its heart.

## **The Challenge of Modernity**

The rise of European nationalism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century challenged Jews to re-think their collective existence. Schematically, this paradigm shift presented Jews with two major options: either opt for maximum openness and integration, or instead, enforce real and symbolic boundaries and in effect, lead a segregated life. This choice was particularly relevant in America; the American-Jewish community of the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century benefitted from and contributed to American

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1 Ofer Shiff, “Early American Zionist Responses to the Israeli Demand for Aliyah”, in *Modern Judaism - A Journal of Jewish Ideas and Experience*, Volume 38, Issue 1, 1 February 2019, pp. 96-119.

liberalism, while working hard to maintain and perhaps even justify its unique ethnic characteristics and way of life. Additionally, the Zionist project presented American Jews with another stress factor to the already delicate balance between ethnic, national and religious affiliations.

## Kaplan's Response

Mordecai Kaplan, the founder of Reconstructionist Judaism, introduced the idea of "Judaism as a civilization". He understood these nuances and sensitivities well, and in the early 1940s was looking for a term that would accurately capture the tension between universalism and particularism, pluralism and nationalism, isolation and openness; a term to assist Jews in coping with their collective identity crisis.

Kaplan's main concern was rebuilding a living, meaningful and attractive collective Jewish identity in the new world order. He was adamant to persuade his congregation that a distinction between nation, nationhood, and nationality should be maintained. As Noam Pianko points out<sup>2</sup>, this was very much "terminological hairsplitting". Consequently, several members offered their own alternatives for the concept of "nationhood", which Kaplan took to mean "those bonds of unity which make a group either a nationality or a nation". One of these alternatives was "peoplehood", which in 1942 became the official alternative adopted by Kaplan, to the point where this phrase became "basic to the whole Reconstructionist position".

Kaplan's Peoplehood is succinctly explained in the following sentence: "this self-identification of the individual Jew with his Jewish People is the source of the mystical element in the Jewish religion"<sup>3</sup>. In other words, Jewish Peoplehood is the underlying, invisible force behind religion. Accordingly, Zionism is meant to serve the Jewish people, and not the other way around.

As such, the concept of Peoplehood met an existential-collective need of the Jewish community to retain a certain level of ethnic exclusion, while burgeoning into an established and respectable minority in America. Moreover, the phrase "Jewish peoplehood" offered a much-needed balance between loyalty to their new home and support of the Zionist project, while relieving Jews from the demand to make *aliyah*.

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2 Noam Pianko, *Jewish Peoplehood: An American Innovation*, Rutgers University Press (2015).

3 Mordecai M. Kaplan, "The Crisis in Zionism as Crisis in Judaism", *A New Zionism*, New York: The Herzl Press, 1954, pp. 11-46.

## Halpern's Response

Ben Halpern, a leading 20<sup>th</sup> Century Jewish intellectual associated with the Zionist Labor movement, interpreted the phrase "Jewish Peoplehood" differently. Halpern thought that precisely because Jews were becoming increasingly integrated into modern society, they were in danger of forgetting their "otherness", a quality that could not go away as long as they live as a minority in a Christian-Protestant society. This is why the process of successful Jewish integration is deceptive: absent of something to remind Jews of their alien existence and unique collective identity, Jews were destined to essentially disappear.

The role of Zionism as a struggle of world Jewry for independence in Israel is to remind American Jews of the "underlying serious meaning that being a Jew has always had in history"<sup>4</sup>. In other words, Zionism is meant to develop the Jews' sense of exile.

Ariel Feldestein reminds us that for Halpern, the concept of exile was the most consistent Jewish idea; not necessarily a normatively negative concept but rather a state which endowed Jewish existence and history with their significance and special identity. The point of Zionism is to therefore *reject* the exile, but not to *negate* it. Paradoxically, only a "sense of Exile" may bring about the Zionist dream to ingather all the exiles in Israel.<sup>5</sup> Implied in this line of reasoning is Amos Oz's famous metaphor about Israel as the main "stage" where current Jewish drama takes place; and accordingly, his invitation to Diaspora Jewry to move up from the back of the auditorium to center stage, or at least learn Hebrew so they can "follow the drama without earphones"<sup>6</sup>.

And so, a possible reading of Halpern's Jewish Peoplehood emerges. First, Jews are in a perpetual state which prevents them from fully integrating, even in the freest of societies: "the basic situation which defines the Jewish problem everywhere: the situation of exile and fundamental alienhood".<sup>7</sup> Secondly, "the community the Jews maintain under the shelter of religious freedom is in actuality the continuation of a

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4 Ben Halpern, "The American Jewish Problem", *The American Jew – A Zionist Analysis*, New York: Herzl Press, 1956, pp. 34-69.

5 Ariel L. Feldestein, **Ben-Gurion, Zionism, and American Jewry: 1948-1963**, Routledge (2006), pp. 109-110.

6 Amos Oz, "Imagining the Other", in Richard Siegel and Tamar Sofer (eds.) *The Writer in the Jewish Community: An Israeli-North American Dialogue*, Rutherford: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1993, p. 115-123.

7 Ben Halpern, "The American Jewish Problem", *The American Jew – A Zionist Analysis*, New York: Herzl Press, 1956, pp. 34-69.

single historical nationality, the Jewish people. . . There is only one ethnic group, only one historic nationality, in the Jewish church: it is the Jewish people". Therefore, Halpern had arguably also believed in Jewish Peoplehood: a Jewish Peoplehood that precedes religion and rests on national Jewish independence for its survival.

## Conclusion

For Kaplan, the core of Jewish Peoplehood is a "mystical" attachment of Jews to one another, which precedes even religion; an attachment that explains our existence and collective search for meaning over time. It should be noted, however, that Kaplan's God was not transcendental but imminent: his Judaism was a "dynamic civilization", a synthesis of peoplehood, culture, and religion<sup>8</sup>. As such, it becomes clear why Kaplan's Peoplehood is characterized by a thriving diasporic existence. In contrast, Halpern took Jewish Peoplehood to mean a perpetual state of alienhood, and therefore saw poor prospects for authentic Jewish life in the diaspora; prospects that become even gloomier under the lure of modern life and its temptations.

**In this vein, realizing Kaplan's Jewish Peoplehood implies religious and spiritual revival in Israel for the sake of the *entire* Jewish people; while Halpern's Jewish Peoplehood rests on physical and symbolic movement of energy to Israel, as the only place where Jews can be authentic members of society.** This, with an expectation that Zionism, and later on Israel, would bring about a spiritual Jewish revival that would remind Jews of their otherness, while assisting them in coping with this task, despite what may appear to be successful integration into society.

So next time you hear an Israeli or American Jew say, "we must promote Jewish Peoplehood", kindly ask them - what do you mean by that? It may start a difficult but necessary conversation; the kind of conversation the Z21 Movement needs to have if it wishes to carry its mission successfully.

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8 Mordecai M. Kaplan, "The Reaffirmation of Jewish Peoplehood", *A New Zionism*, New York: The Herzl Press, 1954, p 118.



# A Renewed Agenda for Progressive Zionism and Israel Diaspora Relations

**Gilad Kariv**

*"...when the Lord returns the returnees to Zion, we shall be like dreamers".  
(Psalms 126)*

Many people in Israel and the diaspora would definitely agree with the proposition that today, at the beginning of Israel's 8<sup>th</sup> decade of statehood, the Israeli nation and society are at a strategic crossroads. While dealing with continued external threats and the growing lack of geo-political stability which has characterized the Middle East in recent years, Israeli society is also dealing with core questions of identity, self-definition, and basic values. To a significant degree, it can be claimed that the decisions Israeli society faces today are no less crucial than those faced by the generation of Israel's founders. This situation should not come as a surprise. We often say that one year in the life of a dog is equivalent to seven years of human life. Examining Jewish and human history enables us to similarly state that one year of human life is equivalent to seven years of sovereignty and the life of a country. In many ways, Israeli society is currently in a situation comparable to the transition between youth and adulthood, where it is beginning to formulate its character and core values in an in depth and comprehensive manner. An examination of the Book of Ezra and Nehemiah teaches us that this was exactly the fate of the second period of Jewish sovereignty. Seventy years after the return from Babylon and after the establishment of the Second Temple, the second and third generations of our people under the leadership of Ezra and Nehemiah began to develop their society's religious ideological character and belief system, while experiencing complicated internal conflicts. This historical pattern, in which the third generation following the revolution and achievement of independence finds itself in a debate and even conflict over ways of life and values, is familiar to every American citizen who is aware of his or her history.

The recognition that Israeli society is facing a period of fateful decisions relating to its character and core values necessitates an understanding that whoever wants to influence this process and the decisions that will be reached, must implement three critical steps. The first: developing a clear, coherent and relevant ideological worldview.

The second: creating an educational, cultural, communal, and political “tool-kit” that is effectively capable of implementing the ideology and worldview from step one. The third: promoting coalitions and alliances with other parties with whom there is a shared belief system and common agenda. In this spirit, an examination of Israeli reality over the past two decades shows that the progressive Jewish-Israeli forces have reached this historical and strategic crossroads with depleted strength and mediocre achievements in the three steps outlined above. **These forces, which to a great extent led the Zionist revolution and the creation of the state of Israel, and whose members continue to be part of groups that occupy significant leadership roles in Israeli society, are struggling in each of the three essential actions. As a result, they are not successful in formulating policies and positions that influence the developments in Israel and even in the Jewish world. This difficulty was reflected in the results of the recent elections in Israel, but the most significant recent expression of this weakness was in the passing of the Nation State Law (Basic Law: Israel - the Nation State of the Jewish People).** This law was ratified at the end of a legislative and political process that took place over 20 years. During this period, many varied sectors in Israel made conscious efforts to develop an agenda and worldview on the basic core questions of Israeli society. One example is the Israeli-Arab sector, whose political and social leaders worked intensively to develop a vision and position papers since the beginning of the new millennium. The second example is Israel’s right wing – mainly the National Religious Zionists, whose leaders are responsible to a great degree for the promotion of the Nation State Law. Within the ideological, social and political process that took place over many years, the weakness of the progressive Zionist voice was extremely evident in its failure to present a vibrant, serious, and relevant ideological alternative to the positions presented by the other forces.

Naturally, this article is too limited in scope to conduct an in depth discussion of the multitude of processes essential to significantly strengthen the influence of the progressive Zionist voice on Israeli society and the Jewish world. With that said, precisely because Israeli society does not only express itself on pragmatic questions but also on core ideological and ethical subjects, it is worthwhile to present core positions and basic ideological precepts of the progressive Zionist agenda. These positions should include the following central principles that exist side by side with the need to ensure Israel’s existence and security.

- Strengthening of Israel’s democracy in all its key aspects and countering theocratic and anti-democratic trends through emphasizing the unbreakable connection between democratic strength, and the fulfillment of the Zionist ideal.

- Unceasing efforts to end the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and achievement of a political solution that will give both peoples national self-determination in the land of Israel; abstaining from steps that would prevent achievement of a solution in the short or long term.
- Striving to create an exemplary society committed to social solidarity, equal opportunity, reduction of socio-economic gaps, with effective social safety-nets; including an effort to integrate all Israeli communities and sectors in public, economic, and cultural life.
- Nurturing of a shared society between the Jewish and Arab citizens of Israel, based on developing equal opportunity, reduction of societal gaps, recognition of the special status of minority communities in Israel, developing common civil society among all Israelis and fighting all forms of racism and discrimination.
- Fostering an influential, diverse, and rich Jewish-Israeli culture that encourages religious and cultural pluralism. Freedom of religion and conscience must be ensured to all Israeli citizens along with separation of religion and state.
- Developing a sense of Global Jewish Peoplehood and strengthening the connection between Israeli society and the state of Israel with Jewish communities throughout the world; this connection should be built on the basis of mutual respect, mutual responsibility and mutual influence. Recognition of the potential and the value of Jewish life in all places throughout the world, and the multitude of paths to express Judaism. Mutual and active commitment to the values of Jewish continuity and “tikun olam”, in Israel and the diaspora.

These six fundamental pillars need to be discussed and developed in depth. Within the ideological and practical discussion there will be varied points of view, priorities, and proposals for implementation. Naturally, there will be additional suggestions for further core principles and steps, and certain elements will want to reduce the centrality of some of the presented positions. To a great degree, the very existence of a serious, in-depth discussion and attempt to formulate a progressive Zionist vision for the future of the state of Israel and the future connection between Israel and World Jewry (and mainly the leading center of world Jewry in North America) is crucial in and of itself.

Special attention should be devoted to the sixth pillar that deals with the connection between Israel and the Diaspora. It is no secret that we are facing many challenges in this realm. Nonetheless, it is appropriate to recognize the significant potential inherent in the relationship. From a multi-generational perspective, the two communities - the

Israeli Jewish community and the North American Jewish community - have undergone significant developments regarding the essence of the connection. North American Jewry has transformed peoplehood consciousness and the connection with the state of Israel into a central facet of Jewish identity. Meanwhile, Israeli society has adopted a more tolerant attitude regarding Jewish existence outside the state of Israel, and has put aside the traditional thesis of rejection of the diaspora. These significant processes enable the nurturing of dialogue and actions that will contribute to the resilience of both of the large centers of Jewish life in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The Jews of the diaspora have an important role in developing democratic and progressive values of Zionism, and including them in a central position in the present and future Jewish dialogue. Israeli society and Israeli culture will play a key role in strengthening the ability of Jewish communities around the world to deal with the challenge of Jewish continuity, and will contribute significantly to ensuring high quality Jewish education and communal life throughout the Jewish world.

The discussion on formulating a progressive Zionist agenda must take into account full recognition of the substantial challenges facing Israeli society and many other democratic societies including American society. No less importantly, it must recognize the challenges facing progressive Jewish communities throughout the world. It is no secret that progressive and liberal worldviews are under serious attack by ultra-conservative forces that often adopt theocratic and nationalistic ideologies. It is also important to recognize the fact that often there is a built-in weakness in ideological and political education of progressive groups, which arises from their emphases on individual autonomy, personal realization of goals, pluralism and freedom of thought and action. Nonetheless, it is important to acknowledge the fact that some of the challenges result from the extraordinary achievements of the liberal and progressive worldview in general, and in the Jewish world in particular. These successes must be in our minds as a reminder of our ability to influence reality when we combine vision and action. If we succeed in expanding our circles in Israel and throughout the Jewish world with sensitivity, inclusiveness, and openness to new voices and ideas, and especially if we succeed in working together with mutual responsibility in aiding each other's efforts, we can collectively reach success. The miracle of the establishment of the state of Israel; the wonder of the rebirth of the Hebrew language and culture; the long golden age of North American Jewry; the prosperity of Israel despite its many challenges; and the important phenomena of Jewish pluralistic renewal and feminism in Israel and the Jewish world; all these prove that despair and weakness of spirit have never been a successful plan of action.

History belongs to those who combine study and action, and especially to those fortified with hope and patience. As the poet of psalms taught us in chapter 126, Verse 1 (קִיְיָ יְהוָה: "A song of ascents – when the Lord returns the returnees to Zion, we shall be like dreamers", and in verse 6 "He will go along weeping, carrying the valuable seeds; he will come back with song, carrying his sheaves."

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# The Iceberg Israeli National Security Threat<sup>1</sup>

**Daphna Kaufman**

The political, societal, and economic ramifications of Israel's deteriorating relationship with Jews in the U.S. are becoming too obvious to ignore as a national security threat. With Israel's position deteriorating more broadly among Democrats and the U.S. left, and the delicate equilibrium status of its bi-partisan support steadily and rapidly undermined, Israel's Jewish allies still and again prove their indispensability in its defense. In contrast, contravening trends of Jews supporting or being influenced by anti-Israel campaigns have become central for advancing anti-Israel, and sometimes overtly anti-Semitic, agendas on the left.

While the tip of this iceberg becomes exposed in extraordinarily turbulent surrounding waters, an underlying national security threat remains deeply submerged. At its base is a crisis of vision and derived mission – for Zionism, for the future of Israel and of the Jewish people. Indeed, without dealing with this crisis, no combination of technical solutions or miraculous improvements in external circumstances will provide a sustainable solution to stopping the hemorrhaging of Jewish, and young Jews in particular, support for and identification with Israel. Avoiding the iceberg will require a fundamental change of course.

## **National security beyond national interests**

If Israel loses the Jews, implications reach beyond strategic losses in political, societal and economic spheres. The damage can extend far deeper than the net effects of losing a valuable ally. The risk is of jeopardizing Israel's role as the nation-state of the Jewish people, and with it the foundation that has cohered Israel's identity internally and within the Jewish people - that undergirds Israel's place among the nations.

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1 This article is based on a knowledge development process the author undertook with the Reut Institute's 'peoplehood taskforce,' led by Reut Managing Director Naama Klar.

Israel could lose its mandate-derived 'internal legitimacy,' measured in the extent to which Israel fulfills its mission of serving the Jewish people. It is a basis of an 'Israeli exceptionalism,' rooted in the historic circumstances of Israel's re-birth as the modern Jewish state and in the weight and depth of Jewish history. It elevates the centrality of Israel's role in serving the Jewish people within its mandate, and the centrality of its mandate to Israel's national story and survival. It intertwines the path and destinies of Israel and the Jewish people, and centrally anchors Israel's fundamental legitimacy.

**In essence, the problem is not the effect of losing your best soldiers to defend you in the delegitimization fight. The problem is that if you have lost the support of these soldiers, you have lost the larger premise that you are defending. Because if your claim to international legitimacy embodies a vision of a nation-state for the Jewish people and your commitment to serve as such, and if the Jewish people do not broadly identify you as their nation-state, you will need to find a new mandate and to re-negotiate the fundamentals of your global engagement. This is the 'iceberg legitimacy crisis' looming menacingly in existential depths while peaks of Jewish vulnerability to BDS and anti-Israel campaign reveal its scope.**

Neither of the two main approaches dealing with the national security implications of declining Jewish identification with Israel directly contend with this underlying internal legitimacy threat – a vision crisis under the strategic crisis. A 'bypassing approach' counters tangible effects by generating alternate alliances and engagement opportunities, and a 'relationship-building approach' emphasizes connectiveness between Israel and Jewish communities. The former approach puts Israel on a collision course with its mandate-derived internal legitimacy; it will also profoundly alter global engagement trajectories – for example, amplifying the need to strengthen relationships with Evangelical communities and authoritarian governments at a precarious moment of global turbulence and re-alignments. The second approach is important; however, without viewing the disconnect as a symptom, success in this area may only smooth over current and contextual cracks surfacing from yet unresolved underlying contradictions.

Charting the new course necessary to avoid the iceberg will entail challenging fundamental assumptions; it will also require challenging the prominent Israeli historic 'negation of the Diaspora' ethos and derived national security approaches to the Jewish people that focused on 'ingathering the exiles' and saving threatened Jews. It will lead to re-envisioning what it means to be a national home in the 21<sup>st</sup> century in a starkly different way than the Israeli Knesset's July 2018 controversial 'nation-state bill' did. The bill enshrined Israel's purpose as a national home for the Jewish people in Israeli Basic Law, which deepened tensions and divides rather than imbue the concept with meaning.

## **Towards 'peoplehood security'**

To protect its internal legitimacy, Israeli national security must serve the continued, meaningful existence of the Jewish people systematically and systemically as a guiding logic in evaluating domestic and international issues. The Reut Institute calls this concept 'peoplehood security.'

Peoplehood security perspectives view the connection between the Jewish state and a strong global Jewish Diaspora network as a national security issue essential for sustaining internal legitimacy. Israel's national security assets are ultimately intended to serve the Jewish people. In the American context, for example, peoplehood security assumes that Israel's alliance with a superpower is ultimately intended to serve the Jewish people, whereas national security perspectives frame the Jewish people as an asset because they uphold our relationship with a superpower. Accordingly, it is the unique value of Israel to the Jewish people, and the reality that half of the Jewish population resides in Israel and is subject to extreme security vulnerabilities, that justifies security resource focus on the defense of the state.

Bringing the threat to Israel's internal legitimacy to the fore has a number of immediate implications, primarily that cultivating a vibrant Jewish peoplehood that is connected to Israel becomes an Israeli national security imperative. Thus, Jewish communal interests and many issues seen in Israel as domestic are actually significant to the Jewish people and become essential factors in national security models and assessments. To illustrate: the 2017 cancellation of the Kotel compromise, which exposed and accelerated the growing crisis dividing Israel and the Jewish people, constituted a national security event in the Israeli blind spot.

In pursuing national security interests narrowly viewed, too often acts that seemingly promote Israeli national security, actually erode Israel's internal legitimacy. This paradox results from a blind spot on the national security significance of Israel's mandate and purpose vis-à-vis the Jewish people. The deteriorating Israel-Jewish world relations are the first canary in the coal mine.

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## 70 Faces Revisited

**Doron Krakow**

It's a long flight. The return from Israel to New York or to points beyond is at least 11 hours if you fly direct. That's a long time to sit. Some sleep, but others like me tend to do so fitfully more often than not. It's quiet, beyond the steady hum of the engines. And most of the time it is dark, even during the day as windows are closed and cabin lights dimmed. It's a good opportunity to catch up on email, a good book or that movie you missed. Above all, on one particular flight, it was a chance to reflect on "70 Faces – A Leadership Seminar" in Israel, an extraordinary 10-day experience I was privileged to share with some 30 top lay and professional leaders from across the JCC Movement.

"70 Faces" was conceived as an important opportunity for leaders to share in experiencing aspects of Israel and Israeli society. And to do so with an eye toward broadening the nature and scope of our conceptions of how Israel engagement can increasingly become an engine for strengthening Jewish life in our communities back home. It was predicated on an interpretation of Israel that draws upon the wisdom of *Pirkei Avot* (Ethics of the Fathers) reflecting upon the breadth, depth and scope of the Torah. In short, the Jewish people's leading rabbinic authorities of the day concluded that the Torah is such a rich and comprehensive wellspring of wisdom that no single interpretation could possibly do it justice. In fact, they concluded that there are 70 equally worthy ways it can be interpreted, and the Jewish people should strive to encounter them all.

And so it is, we reasoned, with Israel – a complex, multi-faceted society that cannot possibly be understood by way of a single issue, challenge or perspective. In recent years, when we speak about Israel here in the diaspora, we nearly always do so around only two issues: geo-politics (i.e., the conflict or the occupation) and religion (i.e. pluralism, egalitarianism, and access to the Western Wall). As these issues arouse a good deal of emotion and discord, it is a challenge for community leaders to bring people together around Israel and as a byproduct, too many leaders seem to prefer to avoid the subject altogether.

A year ago, on the pages of the 2018 edition of *The Peoplehood Papers* I reflected upon just this notion (*Peoplehood Papers* 22, 2018)). Israel is more than just politics and religion and we, the leaders of the North American Jewish community, have been badly mishandling our responsibilities as leaders by failing to engage our constituents with the sixty-eight other faces that constitute the modern State of Israel. The "70 Faces" Leadership Seminar was planned to embark on a journey to do precisely that.

Over 10 days, our leaders had a remarkable series of encounters with thoughtful and insightful Israelis through whose eyes and work we came to understand the country and its people in ever more nuanced ways. Israel's elections took place on the penultimate day of our seminar, so each conversation occurred against the backdrop of the hopes, fears and aspirations regarding what would happen the day after. But it was more than politics that was on the minds of the people we encountered. So much more.

Lior Shabo and a dozen other members of the [Jerusalem Parliament](#) shared insights into their lives and work and why they, along with nearly a thousand others, are devoted to coming together, from across nearly every social, religious and professional sector to make Israel's capital a better place to live and work.

Hours before his exhibit was opened to the public, [Adi Ness](#), perhaps Israel's most celebrated photographic artist, gave us insight into both the themes and subjects that he depicts through the faces of ordinary Israelis.

In the picturesque hills of Moshav *Givat Yaarim*, we met Yefet Ozery, one of the last Jewish children born in Yemen before Operation Magic Carpet brought them to the newly independent Jewish state in 1950. As a 14-year-old he began a three-year correspondence with David Ben-Gurion about life, ambition and his future in Israel.

The pride of purpose of Supreme Court Justices Yael Willner and Daphne Barak-Erez, underscored the significance of Israel's independent judiciary.

Israel's legal system places judicial responsibility for select matters of family law in the hands of religious courts: Jewish, Christian, Muslim, Druze, etc. Qadi Iyad Zakhalka, a judge in Israel's Shariah high court gave us newfound understanding about the application of religious law in his community.

Rabbi Menachem Bombach has introduced secular studies to his Torah Academy for children from mainstream Hasidic homes, strengthening their abilities to provide for their families as adults, even as they remain firmly rooted in religious tradition.

Dr. Paula Kabalo, one of the foremost authorities on Israel's founding father, David Ben-Gurion, took us into the mind of Ben-Gurion as nation building got underway and into the heart of Israel's founding father in the eve of independence on May 14, 1948.

In Hura, former mayor, Dr. Mohammed Alnabari who holds a doctorate in organic chemistry, shared insights into the work he spearheaded as mayor that markedly improved the fortunes of his municipality, in part through strengthened engagement with several government ministries. During his tenure the tax base increased from just 2% of Hura's citizens to more than 90%. Hura is home to two of the 18 Bedouin tribes making their homes across the Negev.

A hillside at the southern edge of Sderot, a city roughly three miles from the border with Gaza, was the setting for a lesson in local geography and security by Miri Eisen, a retired colonel, decorated intelligence officer and former spokesperson for both the IDF and the Office of the Prime Minister. The roughly 20,000 people living in this lower-middle-class town receive not more than 15 seconds' warning of incoming terrorist rocket fire and more than 10,000 such rockets have targeted Sderot since Israel's disengagement from Gaza in the summer of 2005.

Meital, Jason, Evan, Ilan and Aaron, lone soldiers who left the safety and comfort of lives in America to put themselves in harm's way to protect and defend the Jewish State, talked about why they came and about some of their hopes and dreams.

Eurovision 2019 semi-finalists, [The Shalva Band](#), are the pride of Shalva, the Israel Association for the Care and Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities. Shalva empowers families by promoting social inclusion and was inspired by one family's determination to find a loving place for a severely disabled child in the face of society's rejection to become a worldwide flagship for inclusion and accessibility. Rabbi Kalman Samuels, who came to Israel from Vancouver, Canada in the 1970s has literally brought the dream that is Shalva to life.

So, what does all this have to do with 70 Faces? While 70 Faces certainly refers to elements of Israeli society, perhaps it has more to do with Israelis themselves. Israel is a complicated place. I suppose all countries are. There is also plenty of room for improvement, and after only 71 years, that is to be expected. We should be uncomfortable with the ongoing conflict, the absence of peaceful coexistence in the region and the legitimate grievances of those who are dispossessed, downtrodden or denied opportunity. We can and should voice our hopes for something more. For something better. But we should also acknowledge that from the safety of our lives in North America, there is much we can't adequately understand about the challenges faced by those who are there.

As the first generations in nearly 2,000 years to have been born into a world that includes a sovereign Jewish State, a safe haven for a beleaguered people who for a hundred preceding generations would have given anything just to taste the Jewish world in which we live, perhaps we should resist the impulse to look for something to criticize, and instead start looking for something to love. It isn't hard to find. Just ask Meital, Adi, Kalman or Miri. Talk to Daphne, Lior or Yefet. Pay a visit to Paula, Mohammed, Yotam or Inbal. They are some of the 70 faces we got to see. Israel is more than politics and religion. So much more.

**Doron Krakow is the president and CEO of JCC Association. Doron spent the past 25 years in senior positions with Young Judaea, the Jewish Federations of North American and the American Associates, Ben-Gurion University of the Negev**



# Finding the Next Zionist Common Denominator

**Yohanan Plesner**

It is often stated that Israel's founding in 1948 was a miracle. Many, however, overlook the fact that the Jewish people really experienced two spectacular miracles in the twentieth century. The first is more frequently acknowledged – the reestablishment of the Jewish homeland in the Land of Israel. The second and often less noticed phenomenon is the emergence of the Jewish community of North America - a success story that is almost unrivaled in our people's long history. Today, for the first time in almost two thousand years, there is truly a 'Jerusalem and Babylon' like there was in Talmudic times. And today, like in ancient times, common causes must be found and adopted if we are to ensure the unity of our people and lay the foundations for future generations to continue to nurture this vital relationship.

For the past hundred years, and even more so since Israel's independence in 1948, the primary bond between Jewish communities around the world and the Jewish state has been centered around crisis and existence. For American Jewry, for instance, the concern for Israel's safety and even the very existence of the State during times of war was always a cause for worry and comradeship. For Israelis, the situation was often mirrored. Whenever their Jewish brethren around the globe were threatened by antisemitism or 'merely' by natural disasters, the feeling of a joint bond and common destiny was often strong enough to overcome the existing differences between these two communities and motivate Israelis to offer practical and moral assistance.

Examples of such cases are numerous. Each time Israel has faced war or struggle, the American Jewish community has shown up. This was true in the early years of the State when American Jews ran arms through blockades during the War of Independence to ensure the successful birth of a Jewish state. It continued during other times of great need, for example when Jewish leaders lobbied the American government to re-arm a struggling Israel as it fought off the Syrians and Egyptians from a devastating surprise attack.

The outreach has gone the other way as well. Whenever, and wherever, a Jewish community has been in need, Israel has stepped up. This includes some of the grandest gestures of Jewish solidarity of the last century, such as when Israel dedicated itself to the absorption of almost one million Jews from the former Soviet Union. Or, when Israeli air force planes were sent to airlift Ethiopian Jews to safety and bring them home to their historic land.

We must recognize, however, that these binding elements are no longer enough. There are very few Jewish communities throughout the globe that need Israel to come together with world Jewry to rescue them. Similarly, since the 1973 Yom Kippur War, there have not really been any "existential wars" that have truly threatened the very being of Israel and through which the bond between Israel and the world's Jewish communities would be strengthened.

This is not to say these two communities do not still need each other. American Jewry rushed to offer assistance to Israel during the Second Lebanon War and each time hostilities broke out in Gaza. And just recently, the Israeli government dispatched both material and moral assistance to the US Jewish community following the heinous shooting attack in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

More importantly, the American Jewish community is a strategic ally to the State of Israel; one that is still relied upon for key components of our national security as we ensure our physical survival in a very dangerous neighborhood. Similarly, the relationship American Jewry enjoys with Israeli society is central to their sense of identity and belonging to our ancient nation, especially since the 'over-success' of their acclimation in the US leads to outright assimilation.

These threats, however, are no longer enough to define the relationship. Now is the time to refocus our efforts on the joint values shared across large segments of the political spectrum in Israel and amongst world Jewry. Both of our societies agree on the basic values of democracy. American Jews have always been at the forefront of the battle for the freedoms so eloquently enshrined in the US constitution. They fought for equality for all, and worked to ensure that all Americans have their basic voting rights protected and not be denied their basic human rights. American Jews have also traditionally worked to safeguard judicial independence and played an enormous role in advancing human rights throughout their country, both by dedicating themselves to public service and through robust grassroots civil society activism.

Israeli society champions many of these same values. Despite periodic onslaughts on our democratic institutions, time and again Israelis have proven consistent in their values.

We have not let wars, assassinations, disengagements or ongoing strife between the different segments of our society to supersede our commitment to making democracy work in Israel. In fact, as time has passed, Israeli society has become even more committed to protecting its democracy and promoting equality.

Notwithstanding Israel's reputation as a traditionally conservative society and the dominance of the state-sanctioned rabbinate, Israelis are more supportive of progressive values than some would expect. For example, in the latest Israel Democracy Institute study, findings revealed that 60% of Israelis support same-sex marriages. Similarly, 62% support public transportation on Saturdays despite their respect for the Shabbat as a sacred day.

These sentiments run strong in Israelis' support for key democratic institutions as well. Despite the fact that during the latest election campaign in Israel we witnessed populist attacks, some bordering on demagoguery, by a number of candidates against the justice system and the rule of law, key democratic institutions are strongly supported by large segments of the population. 52% of Israelis, for instance, responded to the survey stating they have immense trust in the Supreme Court. Another 61% feel similarly about the institution of the presidency. These two data sets are of particular significance because they were attacked so virulently during the campaign.

Simply put, Israelis respect and support their democracy and value their freedoms in high numbers. This includes support for civil unions, gay rights and pluralistic values when it comes to their faith.

During my recent travels in the US, I was struck by how much American Jews identify with these values as well. Obviously, America is well known as a bastion of democracy, but the passion displayed for democratic values by the American Jews I spoke to can almost be described as part of a religious commitment. They view this commitment as a core part of their value systems.

Therefore, it can be argued that as Israeli society's commitment to its complementing Jewish and democratic values grows stronger, the stronger the relationship between the Jewish state and the Jewish diaspora will be.

There are dangers inherent to this kind of relationship. Despite the statistics quoted above, there is a risk of Israeli democracy backsliding in a similar manner to what we have seen in some central European countries, such as Poland and Hungary. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu just ran an election campaign by attacking the very rule of law in Israel, and significant portions of the population agree with him that key democratic institutions cannot be trusted and their authority must be curtailed.

US President Donald Trump has added another wrinkle to this debate by continuing to enact policies that are extremely 'pro-Israel', such as moving the American embassy to the Jerusalem and recognizing Israeli sovereignty over the Golan Heights. Those are supported by almost all of the political leaders in Israel. This has driven the Israeli government, and key segments of American Jewry, to embrace the Trump administration, despite a number of its domestic policies that are viewed by some as highly controversial.

In the absence of existential crises, the ties that bind the two great Jewish communities of the world are fraying. While there are attempts to center the relationship on shared values such as volunteerism and 'repairing the world' (Tikun Olam), it would seem that it would make more sense to focus on the democratic values both communities respect and cherish.

As Israel wraps up its election and the US gets ready for what is sure to be its next contentious campaign season, now is the time to redouble our efforts to solidify these democratic values. For us at IDI this means more research on the policies that work best for Israel's unique democracy, more outreach to the general public to make sure we maintain the numbers in support of key institutions and a better job explaining why their backing is needed for those they are less likely to trust today. This is the only way we can be sure that Israel's democratic institutions will not only survive, but also thrive and remain key elements of our society.

As we work to strengthen Israel's commitment to its democratic institutions, we hope that Jewish communities abroad recognize how strong these shared values are. Israelis, for their part, need to put their parochial inclinations aside at times, and speak out when their own government enacts policies that question these same values and delegitimize significant segments of world Jewry.

**Going forward, the commitment to democracy and the joint challenges and goals that the Jews of Israel and the Jews of the US face, can serve as a unifying force to ensure that these two key communities continue to grow and thrive. To accomplish these lofty goals we need leaders, on both sides of the Atlantic, who are ready to initiate the policies and build the infrastructure needed for the Jewish people to flourish in the twenty-first century. I believe we are ready to meet this challenge.**

**Yohanan Plesner is the president of the Israel Democracy Institute in Jerusalem. He previously served as a Member of Knesset from 2007 to 2013.**



# A Peoplehood Based Zionism – Towards a 21<sup>st</sup> Century Zionist Destiny

**Shlomi Ravid**

It is important to begin by acknowledging that 21<sup>st</sup> century Zionism seems to have come full circle. Zionism started as the national movement of the Jewish people, created by the people and for the people. In the decades that followed the means became the end and the State became the focus of the movement, sometimes at the cost of neglecting and downgrading (shililat hagola – the negation of the diaspora) the people it was meant to serve. In recent years however, there is a new shift towards a Peoplehood-based Zionism. Some of the principles articulated at the Z3 and Z21 gathering last December, are a case in point:

Peoplehood is the binding formative ideal of World Jewry and Israel.

- Israel and World Jewry are two centers equal in their significance for the Jewish destiny.
- A vibrant Diaspora is a Zionist imperative.

This development is indeed a positive step towards a stronger and healthier relationship between Israelis and world Jews. And yet it needs to account also for the changes in the meaning of Peoplehood as we interpret it today. If Peoplehood is “the formative ideal of World Jewry and Israel”, what do we mean by it and how does it influence our understanding of Zionism?

In his famous Midrash Kol Dodi Dofek<sup>1</sup> Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik introduced two defining Jewish covenants:

**“The covenant of fate** - The oppressive sense of fate undergoes a positive transformation when individual-personal existences blend together to form a new unit – a people. The obligation to love one another stems from the consciousness of this people of fate, this lonely people that inquires into the meaning of its own uniqueness. It is this obligation of love that stands at the very heart of the covenant made in Egypt.

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1 “Kol Dodi Dofek”, Joseph B. Soloveitchik, translated by David Z. Gordon, 2006

The covenant of destiny - What is the nature of the covenant of destiny? Destiny in the life of a people, as in the life of an individual, signifies a deliberate and conscious existence that the people has chosen out of its own free will and in which it finds the full realization of its historical being... The people is embedded in its destiny as a result of its longing for a refined, substantive, and purposeful existence”.

Soloveitchik further explain the difference between the two states of minds:

"In order to explain the difference between a People of Fate and a Nation of Destiny it is appropriate to deal with a different contrast — that between an Encampment and a Congregation..."

"Encampment and Congregation constitute two different sociological experiences, two separate groups that have nothing in common and do not support one another. An Encampment is created out of a desire for self-defense and thrives on fear. Congregation is fashioned out of longing for the realization of an exalted moral idea and thrives on love. In the Encampment, fate's rule is unlimited, whereas destiny rules the Congregation. The Encampment represents a phase in the development of the nation's history. The continued survival of a people is identified with the existence of the Congregation".

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century the Jewish people began shifting towards a covenantal Peoplehood. During the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century – the post Holocaust decades, the emphasis was on the re-building of the Jewish world and the State of the Jewish people. The covenant of fate was dominant and the need to prioritize the state building cause seemed both just and practical. Zionism provided the historical response to thousands of years of Jewish lack of homeland and the Jewish people galvanized around the Zionist project.

But 70 years later, when Israel is a fact of life - a given if you will, and as questions of Jewish destiny are taking center stage, Jewish Peoplehood is changing. For most Israelis Peoplehood is still a covenant of fate, and from that consciousness, as Soloveitchik points out, stems their obligation to love their people. In the United States however, the “longing for a refined, substantive, and purposeful existence” results in the search for destiny. If at the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the two somehow converged, in the reality of the 21<sup>st</sup> century they often conflict.

**How do those changes impact 21<sup>st</sup> Century Zionism? The most important thing to understand is that just like Peoplehood has been shifting from issues of connectivity, joint responsibility and solidarity, towards the exploration of**

**purpose, meaning and vision, so should Zionism. Questions of the meaning and purpose of Zionism in the 21<sup>st</sup> century need to be addressed if it is to remain vital and continue to thrive. Exploring what should be its current ethos and what should be the unique values and features of the State of the Jewish people, are the order of the day. Those questions need to become an integral part of the 21<sup>st</sup> century joint conversation of Israelis and world Jews.**

This conversation will by no means be an easy one. Partly because it opens a larger question regarding the Jewish people today, namely: Do we share the same destiny? The answer is far from obvious. As indicated by the last elections in Israel, among other polls, the majority of Israelis seem to prioritize what is "good for the Jews" over Jewish-ethical and social considerations. This is reflected in policies towards the occupied territories, asylum seekers, Israeli Arabs, non-Orthodox Jews, Israel's poor, etc. For American Jews, and especially the young ones, many of whom perceive the Jews as a privileged group already, the above are difficult to accept. They conflict with the notion of a Jewish destiny.

But it is precisely because the issues are so problematic that we need to address them collectively. If Israel is to remain central to the Jewish enterprise, 21<sup>st</sup> Century Zionism needs to be reinterpreted and its destiny rearticulated. Or in the spirit of the current holidays and in Soloveitchik's words: "A Congregation is a holy nation that does not fear fate and does not live against its will. It believes in its destiny and of its free will sanctifies itself for its realization. The Covenant of Egypt was made with a people that was born in the Encampment, the Covenant of Sinai was concluded with a holy people." It is time to articulate the Zionist destiny of the 21<sup>st</sup> century together.

**Shlomi Ravid is the founding Executive Director of the Center for Jewish Peoplehood Education**



# Temptation to Disengage from Israel is a Honey Trap

**Eran Shayshon**

Jewish communal organizations continue to cringe over the declining empathy and patience a segment of young American Jews feel for Israel. Yet despite expending significant resources to address this challenge, efforts tend to fall short. As a result, the temptation to disengage from Israel and focus on domestic issues is significant. **This article, however, warns that disengaging from Israel is a honey trap. Such a move is potentially catastrophic for Jewish continuity and the resilience of the Jewish People, imploding the ideal of Peoplehood and sending the wrong message regarding the core Jewish value of solidarity (Arvut hadadit).** Instead of disengaging, we must create a new and updated framework for a future World Jewry-Israel relationship that acknowledges and elevates both centers of the Jewish world.

Since its establishment and certainly following the 1967 Six Day War, the State of Israel received broad and unreserved support from the majority of the Jewish world. This support largely pushed aside disagreements and differences surrounding Israel, even as criticism over the Palestinian issue began to increase in the 1990s.

Yet support and identification with Israel among American Jewry is slowly eroding. The younger generation's connection to Judaism is weakening as is their appreciation for the community's institutions. For many Jewish millennials, the perception of Israel as pluralistic, peace-seeking and democratic is eroding, and their critical view of Israel is often the main source of their political and social activism. Moreover, the aversion that the majority of the Jewish community has towards the current adamantly pro-Israel U.S administration, which provides unequivocal support for Israel, only furthers the emotional gap between American Jewry and Israel.

In this climate, the imperative of supporting Israel and even fighting against anti-Israel sentiment is losing consensus in the Jewish community. Increasingly, the rising generation sees threats to Israel's legitimacy as exclusively an 'Israel problem' or as "fake news" propagated by Israel's government to avoid criticism. As such, a growing number of

voices within American Jewry are challenging the notion that fighting anti-Israel groups should be a core issue within the Jewish communal organizations and are calling to focus solely on domestic issues. This dynamic diminishes Jewish communal cohesion and undermines the political strength and efficacy of the American Jewish community; it also compromises the ability of the Jewish community to engage with young liberal Jews.

Thus, it is no wonder that calls to disengage from Israel are gaining momentum. If the connection with Israel creates such grave challenges to the Jewish community, and if the Government of Israel's action only reinforces the message that Israel overlooks World Jewry, why bother working on that connection?

And yet, **disengaging from Israel may prove to be a honey trap, disastrous to the future of the Jewish people.** First, disengagement from Israel would mean the implosion of the ideal of Peoplehood, which will only further exacerbate the Jewish identity crisis. In the past few decades, Jewish communal organizations in America have embraced the notion of peoplehood and made it the organizing principle in their activities, striving to make peoplehood the main foundation of Jewish identity and Jewish life in America. **One of the foundations of the ideal of Peoplehood is the focus on the nature of emotional and social connections between Jews regardless of any dominant ideology, which highlights a common destiny and the shared kinship.** Disengaging from Israel is a slap to the face of the ideal of peoplehood, and might create an identity vacuum that will endanger Jewish continuity in the long run.

Moreover, disengaging from Israel will send the wrong message to young Jews regarding the core Jewish value of solidarity and the duty of collective responsibility. Jewish solidarity is one of the most important defense mechanisms allowing for Jewish survival throughout history. Despite the divergent interests and different agendas, the Jewish people are at their best when they choose to put aside their differences and join together around a common ideal or enemy. As such, disengaging with Israel will only exacerbate the challenges of the Jewish community.

The declining relevance of Jewish communal organizations to younger generations may be dominantly the result of a global trend of increasing mistrust of centralized representation. Americans today, Jews and non-Jews alike, have the lowest confidence levels in public institutions and governmental leaders in American history. Thus, disengaging from Israel may not help Jewish communal organizations gain increased relevance with their constituencies. On the contrary, disengagement will only deepen fissures within communities, philanthropic circles, and even families, and dramatically undermine the political efficacy of the Jewish communal organizations.

Israel and North America are the two centers of the Jewish World, intertwined and inseparable components of the Jewish people today. It is clear that the traditional role of the “pro-Israel” community is not simply to satisfy the needs of a rising Jewish generation. Instead, we must create a new framework for engagement where the Jewish community can feel understood and valued by Israeli leaders and citizens. Doing so requires keeping as many Jews within the conversation as possible, finding new ways for World Jewry to express their opinion within Israel, and strengthening the ideals of Jewish peoplehood from every angle. It will also require the Jewish community to engage in collective learning through constant experimentation, modeling best practices and sharing success stories across the global Jewish community.

Furthermore, if Israel plans to hold onto its status as the nation-state of the Jewish people, it must develop a consciousness of peoplehood within society by expanding the knowledge-base of Israelis on World Jewry. Such a shift would give Israelis the context to develop a sense of responsibility and solidarity with the greater Jewish people. Israel should be more sensitive and receptive to the criticism of World Jewry directed at Israeli policies. Maintaining a strong connection between Israel and world Jewry is the order of the day and the task of our generation.

**Eran Shayshon is the CEO of the Reut Group**



# Peoplehood is the Platform – Zionism Brings it to Life

**Gil Troy**

As more and more Jews retreat from the Z-word in this age of postmodernist, anti-Zionist delegitimization, some champion “Peoplehood” as the safer, more popular, Politically-Correct platform for defining and mobilizing the Jewish people. I am a Peoplehood person. I embrace the Jewish people along with the Jewish religion as one of Judaism’s two fundamental foundation stones. My membership in the Jewish people is one of my most profound commitments – and most meaningful identity building blocks. And, yes, the dance between Peoplehood and Zionism requires some choreographing. But trying to replace Zionism with Peoplehood is a cowardly strategy doomed to fail.

Two engines are driving this proposal. The first, downgrading Israel from the center of the Jewish people to one of many Jewish communities all on par ideologically, betrays millennia-old Torah teachings and modern Zionist thought – especially the vision of Ahad Ha’am. The second, hoping that this makeover might somehow make us acceptable to the bigot, assails Jewish pride, presumes a rationality our enemies lack, defies thousands of years’ worth of evidence, and negates the vision of Ahad Ha’am’s rival Theodor Herzl.

With the exorcism over, looking forward, what affirmative vision might unite us, motivate us, and mobilize us as a people? Why would an intelligent, patriotic Jew today try banking on a battered concept like Zionism, rather than retreating into the safe space of Jewish peoplehood?

My reluctance begins with my Beginite refusal to surrender to an ideological mugging, this systematic campaign to delegitimize Zionism. Even deeper, if the Zionist movement could pull off the miracle of creating the State in 1948, we can win today’s ideological war, facing much less sobering historical odds. But most profoundly, if Herzl and company hadn’t done such good work inventing Zionism, we would have to invent something like Zionism today. The Zionist writer Joseph Brenner affirmed “There’s no Other Place” than Israel, our homeland. Similarly, There No Better Way than Zionism, our movement of Jewish nationalism, to put Jewish peoplehood into action while reviving

Judaism in the modern world. The best proof comes from examining what has become the world's largest and fastest growing Jewish community: Israeli Jewry.

Beware category-mistakes. Debating "peoplehood versus Zionism" is like debating the merits of soccer versus HaPoel Yerushalayim. I like soccer because I prefer kicking a ball to throwing or hitting it; I embrace peoplehood because we have a past, present and future. Zionism, like HaPoel, brings the abstractions to life.

There is no chicken-egg here: we start with Peoplehood, there is no Zionism without it. Zionism builds on peoplehood to support nationalism, statehood, and Judaism in all its fullness, including religion. In this unexpected feedback loop rooted in the Bible, peoplehood-power boosts religion because both are so intertwined with land and now state.

Talking peoplehood reinforces Judaism's uniqueness as an Oreo Cookie. Just as only by fusing the cookie and the cream do you get the world's most popular cookie, so, too, only by fusing the national and religious dimensions do you get one of the world's most resilient – and, alas, targeted – civilizations. In founding the modern Zionist movement Theodor Herzl declared "we are a people". He then launched a movement to save us physically from our enemies, and fulfill our religious and national values, by establishing a Jewish state in our homeland.

Thus, the Holy Trinity of Zionism as the national liberation movement of the Jewish people, reflects three assumptions: the Jews are a people, not just a religion; Jews have ties to a particular land, Eretz Yisrael, which doesn't preclude others having ties to that land; and like 192 other peoples today, Judaism most fulfills itself by establishing and now perfecting a nation-state in that homeland. Ahad Ha'am failed to appreciate Herzl's insight – that Judaism needs that political dimension, practically and existentially. But Ahad Ha'am bested Herzl in better understanding how the national reJewvenation of Jewish ideas, commandments, values, dreams, and stories in the Jewish ground zero, the homeland, could spill over and inspire Jews spiritually, culturally, even personally.

If Herzl's great achievement today is the thriving – and growing – and deeply Jewish democratic State of Israel, Ahad Ha'am's vindication is what I call Identity Zionism, the many ways Israel inspires Jews everywhere – making us prouder, stronger, freer, wherever we may live.

To shift metaphors, peoplehood is the primer. Zionism, or the different Zionist schools of thought – Political, Cultural, Religious, Socialist, and Revisionist – mixed with elements in the air – historical reality – is the paint that colors the Jewish community today.

I can happily join a Coalition for Jewish Peoplehood in Israel, because I see that too many Israelis take the foundations for granted. By emphasizing peoplehood in schools, youth movements, families, popular culture, we apply that primer in a first step toward re-energizing the Zionist movement. I can also join a Coalition for Jewish Peoplehood in the Diaspora, because the postmodernist, anti-Trumpian sensibility today only defines nationalism in a narrow xenophobic way, negating its expansive liberal-democratic character. This plays into a Christian reading of Judaism as only a religion, an American reading trying to put American Jewry at the center, and a modern reading of Judaism as only about a universalist, ethereal, commitment to Tikun Olam. Both People Coalitions lay down the primer, improving the foundations.

Ultimately, then, peoplehood is the platform, and even part of the aim – strengthening the Jewish people and saving individual Jewish people while also bringing the Jewish religion alive. But Zionism remains by far the single most effective Jewish movement in the modern world, the action plan for building, and now perfecting, today's greatest Jewish adventure, Israel. And modern Zionism adds a sixth impulse to the previously mentioned five streams: Identity Zionism teaches all Jews, wherever we live, about the power of Jewish peoplehood, the meaning of the Jewish story, and the many possibilities that occur when we embrace the movement of Jewish nationalism, twisting the words of John F. Kennedy, so that you not only ask what you can do for our country – but tap into all that your country can do for you.

Recently designated one of Algemeiner's J-100, one of the top 100 people "positively influencing Jewish life," Gil Troy is the author of the newly-released [The Zionist Ideas](#), an update and expansion of Arthur Hertzberg's classic anthology *The Zionist Idea*, published by the Jewish Publication Society. A Distinguished Scholar of North American History at McGill University, he is the author of ten books on American History, including [The Age of Clinton: America in the 1990s](#).



## Toward Where the Eye is Gazing? And the Heart?

**Yael Yechieli-Persico**

I first heard the term Jewish Peoplehood in the academia, while studying toward a Master's degree at the faculty of education at the Hebrew University. It sounded odd and foreign. Something there didn't flow, wasn't clear. As a person who grew up in the state of Israel, I didn't understand why not use the term "Jewish People". Why was it necessary to have another term and what was the difference between Jewish Peoplehood and the Jewish People? It seemed to me I had met an academic term trying to say something about reality that wasn't connected with anything I had known.

The second time I heard the term Jewish Peoplehood was during a meeting with representatives from Jewish communities in North America who fluently used the term "Peoplehood", which seemed to have replaced the term "Jewish People". I asked myself why they felt a need to change the terminology, and after the conversation I understood. On one hand, there is a deep and profound argument between the Jewish People and Jewish Peoplehood, about the boundaries of the definition of the Jewish People. On the other, there is the question whether there is one, two or more centers to this People. I assume that for the people living in Israel the possibility of more than one center seems inconsequential to non-existent. After all, we grew up being told the story that we were the center and that Jews of the diaspora were welcome to move to Israel or to donate their money to the State. But this was not a recognition of them as a Jewish center. There is one center and it is in the state of Israel. It seems that this has not been the perception of American Jews in recent years, and out of these changes came the term Jewish Peoplehood.

In the term Peoplehood there is something being created, something taking place at this very moment. It is not an inanimate, historical, genetic term. It is a process taking place like eddies in water. Circles of Jews who together make up the whole, and in the margins, travel between belonging and not belonging. The Israelis are not preoccupied with the issue of the Jewish identity. It seems as if the state and society capture their identity. They don't ask questions about who is inside and who is outside of the Jewish People, and who does our Judaism include. It is as if these concepts became fixed with

the establishment of the Jewish state. The Jewish society abroad is forced to ask these fundamental questions, and to find relevant and up-to-date answers in order to hold their own identity and the identity of their children. Jewish Peoplehood is one of these answers.

It is not the first time that the culture and leadership are required to give different answers from the ones given in the past. After the destruction of the second temple and the exile that followed, the Jewish center existed in Babylon and most of the Jewish People found themselves outside of Israel. The central Talmud, the Babylonian Talmud, was written in the Babylonian center. That Talmud has been, and may still be to this very day, the basis of the Oral Torah. At that time there was a small Jewish center in Israel as well. There was an exchange between the centers. The heads of the communities - the Rabbis, and part of the public travelled back and forth between them and so the connection was kept for generations. Obviously, there was tension between the communities. One kept the Hebrew and the other moved to Aramaic, and also incorporated Greek proverbs. Yet with all of the differences, the scriptures show that the situation seemed to be clear - one People with two centers: the center in Babylon being the larger one and the center in Israel holding much of the hope of returning to Israel one day. That same hope that ends every Passover Haggadah - next year in built Jerusalem.

With the scattering of the Jewish People in the diaspora along the years, the big centers moved to Europe, to Spain, and the Israeli center remained small and minute throughout time; yet it held the essential connection between the People of Israel and the country of Israel. The Zionist movement and the establishment of the Jewish State changed the Jewish map. The Israeli center grew rapidly and became the big center holding the connection between the People and the land and between the People and themselves. It seems that during the first decades of the existence of the state this division was acceptable to most of the Jewish People in the diaspora. The Jewish center is in Israel and the communities in the diaspora take care of nurturing and caring for the community, but the eye - gazes to Zion.

In recent years one can see a rupture in this notion, especially within the American communities. There are too many gaps between the state of Israel and these communities. The state of Israel is operating against the various religious streams accounting for the majority of the American Jewish communities. The Western Wall compromise is just a symptom - joined by a lack of recognition of conversions conducted by the different streams and political criticism of the occupation, the approach to Palestinians and refugees and more. Out of the growing gaps between the Jewish approach of the leaders and governments of Israel in these years and the leadership of the American communities, it seems that the latter have created the concept of

Jewish Peoplehood. In the state of Israel, they will continue to discuss the Israeli People exclusively, and whoever is not Jewish according to the Orthodox concept is out. And in the American communities they will continue discussing Jewish Peoplehood inclusively - an open, colourful and intricate Judaism.

American Judaism created the term Jewish Peoplehood as a substitute for the Jewish People, a term which gives a place for the sections of the People spread around the globe. The question whether Jewish Peoplehood will be able to emigrate into the Jewish society in Israel is a fascinating one. Time will tell. But in order for that to happen a deep and fundamental change is needed in the approach of the Israeli leadership as well as the Israeli public. A recognition of the fact that what has been will not continue. American Jews have changed the rules of the game, very much in response to the changes in Israel and across the world. They do not view themselves only as the periphery of the Jewish People but as a different center, with different powers, different challenges and different answers to the questions of who the Jewish People is and what is its meaning in the World.

In the time of the exile following the destruction of the second temple it was clear there was more than one center for the Jewish People, and that there was a connection between the different parts of the People. Such a model may be the way to address the current crisis between Israel and Diaspora Jews. There is a deep rupture today between the various parts of the People, and one way of dealing with it may be to embrace the idea of Jewish Peoplehood. An open, colourful and intricate Judaism. **The part which needs to undergo this change is the Israeli community. A process of acknowledging American Judaism. Not another Taglit trip in which American Jews come for one week to get to know the country of Israel and the people living there, but a mutual process of Israelis getting to know American Judaism which speaks a completely different Judaism. The eye and the heart cannot be directed only in one direction. The bridge must become stronger. And this bridge must be crossed in both directions, to know the different parts of this People - to act together where it is possible, and to honour the differences where it is not.**

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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](mailto:publications@jpeoplehood.org).

Past issues can be accessed at [www.jpeoplehood.org/library](http://www.jpeoplehood.org/library)

**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](http://www.jpeoplehood.org)

The vision of **the Oshman Family JCC** in Palo Alto, California is to be the Architects of the Jewish Future®. The OFJCC is an incubator for new expressions of Jewish identity, creating innovative Jewish learning opportunities and celebrations, as well as programs that connect the Jewish world. Each day, the OFJCC serves the San Francisco Bay Area through a variety of educational, social, cultural, fitness, sports and other programs that enrich lives, build community and inspire Jewish journeys. **Zionism 3.0** is a national initiative launched by the OFJCC to bridge the gaps between American Jewry and Israel at a challenging moment in the Jewish Peoplehood story. [www.paloaltojcc.org](http://www.paloaltojcc.org)

**Taube Philanthropies** was established in 1981 by its founder and chairman, Tad Taube. Based in the San Francisco Bay Area, the foundation makes philanthropic investments in civic, and cultural life in both the Jewish and non-Jewish communities in the Bay Area, Poland, and Israel. Its grant making programs support institution-building, heritage preservation, arts, culture, and education, and promotion of Jewish Peoplehood. Taube Philanthropies is committed to collaborative grant making for greater charitable impact and actively partners with numerous philanthropic organizations and individuals. [taubephilanthropies.org](http://taubephilanthropies.org)

**The Reut Group** is a strategy and leadership group that focuses on fundamental challenges facing Israel and the Jewish people. Reut views relations between Israel and World Jewry as a core component of Israel's identity, purpose and national security. Reut initiated **The Peoplehood Coalition** of +200 Israelis who are working to develop a consciousness identity of Jewish Peoplehood within Israeli civil society. Reut also initiated the grassroot **Z21 Movement**, who seeks to bridge the gap by mobilizing communal strength and promoting forward-thinking policy & partnership.

