



JEWISH PEOPLEHOOD & IDENTITY

The Peoplehood Papers

**A selection of essays on Jewish peoplehood
including pragmatic suggestions on how
organizations within and beyond the federation
world can create new understandings and
action plans around the issue**

General Assembly | November 11-13, 2007 | Nashville, TN

United Jewish
Communities

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November 2007

We are pleased to welcome you to the General Assembly and to make available this compelling set of papers on Jewish peoplehood. UJC and the federation system are deeply committed to fostering the commitment to “klal Yisrael:” the unity and totality of the Jewish people. In today’s climate, the meaning of and commitment to Jewish peoplehood is undergoing serious challenge, both conceptually and practically. The papers contained in this collection offer new and pragmatic suggestions on how organizations within and beyond the federation world can create new understandings and action plans around Jewish peoplehood. We are grateful to the authors and their organizations for being our partners and for contributing their important thinking to this most urgent topic.

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What is Jewish Peoplehood? And is it the Right Question? From Defining Peoplehood to Creating Peoplehood Capital

Shlomi Ravid

The poet Yehuda Amichai in his poem "The Jews" addresses a beautiful woman whose grandfather performed Amichai's circumcision long before she was born, with the following words:

"You don't know me and I don't know you but we are the Jewish People, your dead grandfather and I the circumcised and you the beautiful granddaughter with golden hair: We are the Jewish People."

What is Amichai telling us? He is telling us that being part of the Jewish People transcends time and personal acquaintance. We are connected whether we know each other or not, regardless of our knowledge of Judaism or degree of faith, and even without the consciousness of being part of the collective. But more than that, if we, a rather random sample (we do not even know each other), are "**The People**," we both represent it and are responsible for it. This is Amichai's Peoplehood definition.

Scholars are placing Peoplehood somewhere between an "ethnicity" and "nationality." Ethnicity, as it is commonly understood, seems to fall short of explaining the importance Jews are giving to that membership and the norms of behavior they are exhibiting when expressing Peoplehood. Nationality, on the other hand, seems to express more than what we associate with Peoplehood especially as we use it in a context that includes members of multiple nationalities.

The Random House dictionary defines Peoplehood as a "sense of belonging to a People." This definition captures what Peoplehood is, but fails to explain the rationale for that "sensation." Webster on the other hand offers the following definition: "The awareness of the underlying unity that makes the individual a part of a people." It presumes that what makes an individual part

of a People is a certain underlying unity. The awareness of it is what constitutes Peoplehood. This approach places the essence of Peoplehood in the cognitive sphere of "awareness." It fails to explain however, the leap from the intellectual awareness to the sense of belonging and would not be able to explain what Amichai is describing.

Let us take a minute to examine the question of why defining Peoplehood is important. The obvious explanation is that Peoplehood is a complex and not fully understood phenomenon. Furthermore, those who feel a deep sense of responsibility to their people and are concerned with the weakening of the sense of belonging, believe that if we are to work for strengthening and teaching Peoplehood we need to at least understand and define what it means. If we don't fully understand it how are we to teach it?

I would like to offer an alternative approach. My assumption is that while Peoplehood is a vague and complicated concept, deep down inside we actually understand it, some simply feel it. While we may have issues articulating exactly what it means (how many of us can articulate the social contract that constitutes our social structures?), many of us are able to embrace a sense of belonging to a people that is meaningful, reasonably coherent and one that frames significant parts of our lives as members of the collective. Some of us do it because we feel "we have gone a long way together" and Jews are responsible for each other. Others because they believe the Jewish People has a unique role and capacity in making this world better. Some believe that "Ahavat Israel" is a religious command and others see the People as their extended family (Amichai, in the same poem when discussing how we paint the Jews says: "... and I paint them like my father and my mother"). And the list goes on.

If this is indeed the case, and if our major challenge is to sustain and strengthen the Jewish People, then we may be asking the wrong question. The important question is not what Jewish Peoplehood is, but what could strengthen and enhance Peoplehood capital? What strategies should be employed to strengthen the sense of belonging to the Jewish People? What could make belonging to the people a significant, relevant and meaningful value for young Jews? How should we engage them with the past, present and future of their people?

Reframing our challenge in this fashion does not eliminate the earlier questions, but it can put order into our strategic approach. The need to redefine what Peoplehood can mean in the 21st century is crucial if it is to speak to young Jews growing up today. However, we should not wait in exposing them to Jews from other countries and other times until we come up with the "right" interpretation. We should engage them in conversations and trust that those conversations will yield a joint understanding of our role and future as a people. Furthermore, since we don't really know what makes people connect to their collective identity, we should experiment with different approaches and multiple strategies.

Our lead priority, according to this approach, is to focus on the building of Peoplehood capital. It assumes that the current level of Jewish social and cultural capital is in decline and needs enhancement. It calls for bringing Jews from throughout the Jewish world together to get to know each other, to develop a conversation about each other and about their common heritage, values

and future goals. It calls for both face to face encounters, joint projects as well as technology facilitated conversations. This process can initiate a sense of solidarity, of belonging to a larger collective and will eventually lead to the interpretation that will resonate with the people of the future. It will develop both Peoplehood capital and content.

By joining the terms **Peoplehood** and **Social Capital** my intention is therefore to shift the emphasis to the "state of the People" and introduce a concept that is not only descriptive, but also brings with it an array of strategies to influence the reality it portrays. Questions such as what is Jewish Peoplehood are viewed not only as existential but also as instrumental, in that context. Our mission becomes that of building the people, and our challenge turns to developing and initiating strategies, measures and plans of action.

The important thing to remember is that while we never formally articulated and taught Peoplehood in the past, the success story in sustaining the Jews as a People is almost beyond belief. In the face of the challenges to the continuation of the Jewish saga we need to shift our efforts from talking about Peoplehood to the creation of Peoplehood capital. Jews did it successfully in the past and we ought to do it today.

There is no guarantee that we will be able to recreate the magical relationship that Amichai describes. We can, however, do something about the "*You don't know me and I don't know you*" part. It could be a significant first step in the right direction.

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Jonah, A Pair of Jeans and a Story of Jewish Peoplehood: A Message for Yom Kippur 2007/5768

Misha Galperin

We begin this New Year with a review of the year past and a lot of expectation for the year ahead. The prayers that mark the High Holidays are filled with the tension of what a new year will bring: “Who will live and who will die...Who will wander and who will rest.” Usually, when we think about these weighty issues, we are thinking about ourselves as individuals: our lives and professional goals; our health; our families; our spiritual and financial welfare; and the cluster of worries and hopes that we have in each of these areas. Rarely do we stand in anticipation of what a year in the life of our Jewish community will look like, and set a list of goals for what we can do personally to enhance and strengthen those around us as a collective entity. This year, I am asking us to wear two hats during the High Holidays: one hat to consider our own dreams and another hat to dream on behalf of the Jewish people.

To help with this lofty task, I have employed a Biblical prophet, a great American Jewish thinker, and a uniquely American fashion contribution: Jonah, the prophet whose story we read on the afternoon of Yom Kippur; Mordechai Kaplan, founder of the Reconstructionist Movement; and Levi’s jeans, the brainchild of another Jewish American, Levi Strauss, who patented a new garment for laborers on May 20th, 1873, the birthday of blue jeans. Jonah certainly never owned a pair of Levi’s, and I do not know if Kaplan ever wore a pair of Levi’s jeans, but that is beside the point.

As you may recall, Jonah was given a task by God to take responsibility for the spiritual welfare of an entire city, the city of Ninveh. Instead of answering the call, Jonah ran away. He took the first boat out to a place as far away as possible from the location of his mission. As we read the story on Yom Kippur, we are reminded of all of the times that we have tried to escape destiny and responsibility, especially of the Jewish variety. Mordechai Kaplan affirms this in a

question he asked in his magnum opus, *Judaism as Civilization*, which was written in 1933. Kaplan well understood that the American Jewish community was looking for something beyond synagogue attendance and flat, uninspiring Jewish education. He also knew that although Judaism could deliver inspiration, it would be an uphill climb to get people to listen and discover sources of spirituality and wisdom within Jewish tradition. Kaplan begins his book with a question and a dilemma: “Judaism is a problem to those who have to teach it, and what Jew is exempt from teaching it?”

What is the problem that Kaplan has with Judaism and that, arguably, we still have with it? He tells us that parents can no longer teach Judaism as a matter of course to their children because they cannot accept it as a matter of course for themselves. And this does not only apply to parents and children. Kaplan writes—and I quote: “Nowadays anyone who displays an interest in Jewish activities is challenged and must be prepared to explain what he sees in Judaism.” What did he see in Judaism that he felt could compel people to become Judaism’s teachers, to persuade Jews to stay Jewish or to revisit their roots?

What Kaplan saw was beyond religion and ethnicity. Kaplan was the first person, to my knowledge, to coin the term “Jewish peoplehood” for use in the English language. His notion of peoplehood or Judaism as civilization was a combination of religion, culture, values, history, past and future. A definition this broad immediately tells us that peoplehood is not easy to define. In fact, every time I use it in a paper or a speech, my spell-check tells me that it’s not a real word. I don’t mind arguing with a computer; after all, it’s easier to argue with a machine than with American Jewry. But we do need to define our terms. Peoplehood is not about ethnicity, certainly not solely about ethnicity. The story of our people does not and should not come down to a well-spread

bagel. Peoplehood is the combination of culture, religion, history and values under a Jewish umbrella that gives us a profound *feeling* of being connected to other Jews.

I have tried to define the term somewhat to give us the foundation for an intelligent conversation about what Jewish peoplehood is and what it distinctly is not.

Jewish Peoplehood is:

- One of the many “portals” that brings people to Judaism (including religion, social justice, charitable giving or community involvement).
- Common history, culture, values and future (we are a tribe with a mission).
- Extended family (*brit* symbolizes a personal covenant while *arevut* or responsibility signals a shared fate).
- Collective aspects of identity (our relationship to others vs. self).
- A means to unify diversity (“we are one” and that one is made up of different strains in relation to each other).
- Global community of purpose (caring, inspiring and connecting across geographic boundaries).

To understand peoplehood, we also have to figure out what it is not but is commonly confused to be, namely a host of ways to relate to Judaism which, for one reason or another, are either not substantive enough or not meaningful enough to connect people to their traditions across time and through generations.

Jewish Peoplehood is not:

- Nationality alone (we are only deemed part of the Jewish people if we live in Israel).
- Anti-religious or non-religious (we carry Jewish sentiments that imply a meaningful Judaism without any connectivity to Judaism as a religion, either by rejecting Jewish ritual, Jewish history or entire segments of the Jewish community).
- A fundraising gimmick (we “use” Judaism to leverage charity even though our ties to Judaism are themselves weak).
- Ethnicity (bagels, brisket and any other Jewish food or other associations with

race that are not in and of themselves meaningful although they may be pleasurable).

There was a time when this intangible feeling of Jewish pride and connection did not have to be explained. It came down to a community comprised of Jewish friends and relatives, worries and joys over Israel, affiliation with Jewish institutions and a host of other markers of Jewish identity that contributed to and affirmed strong Jewish feelings. Today, we have to articulate why be Jewish because many Jews do not have an enduring sense of Jewish peoplehood. There are many great books and also great speakers who can tell us why be Jewish. Our problem—my problem—is making it relevant and heard to an audience who is not really interested.

Ultimately, I believe that we have not been able to persuade more Jews, especially young Jews, to have this feeling because we don’t know how to tell the Jewish story to an *American* Jewish audience. What do I mean by that? The story of America’s greatness lies in a cultural assumption that individual rights are a central and abiding feature of being an American citizen. As American Jews, we have imbibed the value of individual rights from the air we breathe. American tolerance, non-judgmentalism and the rags-to-riches power of the individual is a source of great pride and patriotism.

But the American story is not the Jewish story. The Jewish story is not about rights. It is about responsibility. When we left Egypt, we were not free to pursue our own individual mandates. We were taken to Sinai and signed on to a list of responsibilities in the form of the Ten Commandments and subsequent additions. In various forms, religious and other, the story of Jewish history is one of obligation. In contrast, American Jews want a religion and culture that emphasizes rights, not responsibilities; choices, not commitments.

And that—in a nutshell—is why I believe it is so hard to tell the story of Jewish peoplehood. Kaplan told us that our job is difficult; he just did not tell us how difficult it would really be. In his words: “Never was a prayer so much in need of being

answered...since it has never been so hard to teach Judaism as it is now. Never did the rising generation so question its value and resent its intrusion into their lives.”

Intrusion is a strong word. People only resent Jewish intrusion into their lives if they see it as a bother and a nuisance, as something they do not need or that has no value.

Because so many American Jews today do not have an answer to the questions—What do you see in Judaism? or Why be Jewish?—many of them see an outdated, outmoded system of law that worked in the days of the Talmud but not today. Others see in Judaism a very limited social network where all of their grandparents’ friends were Jewish and all they cared about were Jewish charities and Jewish causes. Others look at Judaism as a museum piece that is taken out and dusted for certain family events, usually funerals.

My personal favorite expression of Jewish disengagement is the normalized American experience of congregational education which most kids find to be a boring imposition endured until they can have a great big party at age 13 to celebrate not having to “do” Jewish anymore. They think that the religious school experience is what being Jewish means. Why be Jewish today has to have a more compelling answer than that. Jacob Solomon, a colleague from Miami, said that this is the kind of issue that keeps him up at night. It keeps me up at night, and the situation will only get better if it keeps more of us up at night. We’ll have institutions filled with Jewish insomniacs, but at least we may create enough energy to find some answers and solutions!

Coming up with an answer to this question—Why be Jewish today?—is an enormous responsibility and it lies on all of our shoulders. Ultimately, it’s not only about words; it is a counter-cultural change in the way the Jewish community thinks and acts. But I will share some words with you on the subject. I will give you my answer to Kaplan’s question in the form of a personal story and, at the same time, invite and encourage each of you to find and articulate a personal answer for yourselves, if you

haven’t already. You will be surprised at how often you need to answer this question and how grateful you will be to have a compelling answer. You may need it to speak with a friend in crisis who is thinking of leaving the Jewish community through assimilation or simple neglect. You may need it to recruit someone for a position of Jewish leadership in your synagogue, day school or social service agency. You may need it in speaking to your own children who may not be following your path of Jewish commitment.

I believe that my personal story is, in many ways, the story of Jewish peoplehood and an interesting footnote to Kaplan’s discussion of today’s challenges. I was born in the Soviet Union, a place with no Jewish institutions and no access to Jewish education. My own identity as a Jew began with the 1967 war, and it had a Zionist hue. I learned that other Jews were somehow kin to us and we should help them if need be and expect help from them if we need it. We did not have a *siddur* in the house or a *mezuzah* on the doorpost but we—and many others like us—had a portrait of Einstein on the wall and a collection of “Jewish” books. Jewish history was discussed or mentioned through the secular authors whose works were allowed in the Soviet Union—be it Thomas Mann or Lion Feuchtwanger.

My identification with the Jewish people started through these few symbolic items. It grew because of a Brazilian great-aunt of mine who was well-traveled and relied upon Jews to help and connect her wherever she went. When she visited us in Odessa in the 1960s, she explained to me that being Jewish always means having a family of people who care about you and take care of you wherever you are. She told me explicitly that no matter what country I found myself in, Jews would be there to help. She was not religious. She was not a cultured Jew. For her—and she communicated the same value to me—being Jewish was about seeing other Jews as members of your own family.

Not long after we declared our intent to leave the Soviet Union, I began to see the truth of my great-aunt’s words. We got a

package from the Joint that contained things we would need to survive. It was not a food package as people get these days. What did I find in the package? What was the ultimate dream gift for a Soviet adolescent? A pair of Levi's jeans.

I couldn't believe it.

A pair of Levi's jeans was several month's salary for my father, and here were Jews far away who did not know me or my family but were prepared to give us Levi's. What a great people! What great taste! Someone reached over the Iron Curtain and lent us a hand to cushion the difficult transition ahead. And they succeeded in making a teenage boy very wistful. I wanted those jeans so badly. But the jeans were not there to be worn. They were sent to be sold so that we could live on the money we got. When we declared our intention to emigrate, both my parents lost their jobs, and we desperately needed the money.

Under what justification were we allowed to leave? Why did the Soviets let us leave? They let us go under the rubric of family reunification. It was precisely what my great-aunt said. Strangely, many of the families that were prepared to sign for us from other countries were actually not family in name or blood. We got invitations from people who never met us but were prepared to call us family, just because we were Jews. Years later I actually met the man who created the program for the Joint to send packages with jeans to the refuseniks. He was the president of the Joint Distribution Committee, and his son is now a major donor involved with us in the Greater Washington area. I got to thank him in person. It's funny how life works. I learned about peoplehood from a pair of pants. Had it not been for those Levi's, I probably wouldn't be working in the Federation today. How's that for brand loyalty?

Why did I tell you this story even though I am well aware that my experience is not applicable to most American Jews who do not see owning Levi's as a privilege and rarely have to sell their jeans to make a living? I tell it because peoplehood is a concept so strong, so binding, that it goes well beyond joining a club for its benefits or

enjoying the company of a group. Vibrant, healthy communities also require commitment. People felt a commitment to me that gave me enormous help and instilled tremendous gratitude. Had they not felt a sense of overarching responsibility for fellow Jews, I don't know where I would be now, but I doubt it would be where I am standing now. There were so many people who felt responsible for me and my family: social workers, ESL teachers, health aids and resettlement programs. My younger sister got a scholarship to a day school. My grandmother received assistance from a Jewish agency serving the aged. We received help and saw a helping hand from every direction.

And then a funny thing happened. I went to synagogue and all of a sudden, being Jewish was not only about being a member of a family. I had to know things that I did not know to feel belonging. I felt lonely and ignorant in synagogue because I had no idea what to do. Around me, I saw how powerful the synagogue is in creating a community of caring and helping people develop a sense of Jewish peoplehood. It is one of the most important portals we have in contemporary American Jewish culture for generating feelings of belonging, a metaphoric family for many. And yet, because Communism did away with churches and synagogues, it was not an immediate part of *my* Jewish cultural lexicon. I felt myself on shaky ground in a sanctuary, not knowing what to do with my feelings of incompetence.

Ironically, I had learned just enough about Judaism to feel deeply ignorant. My education about Judaism evolved and is still evolving. Over time, I also learned about institutions and denominations and divisions. I learned about rules and politics in the Jewish community: who is in and who is out and why. Suddenly it started looking a lot like the Soviet Union I left behind. Gone was the passionate link to a universal Jewish family; it fell to the wayside as we started to worry about other definitions of being Jewish.

In recent years, the divide between the nationalism of Israelis and the religion of American Jews is also making its way as

another identity division among our people. Research demonstrates that the Atlantic Ocean is not the only thing that divides us. It is for this reason, because of all of these divisions, that we may have lost the loving feeling that people associate or once associated with being part of a Jewish family. We can't afford to lose that feeling. We have to do everything we can to grow and nurture it. Peoplehood is not about the haves and have-nots. It's about a collective umbrella that's big enough to embrace us all. Federation annual campaigns used to be modeled on this ethic. Raising money was primarily about participation and building community together. Parallel to the ancient Israelite experience of donating a half-shekel, a Federation campaign was there to find a place for everyone. But now we have created an impression that Federation campaigns are only about the shekel and not about belonging, membership and participation. We have to revisit this sense of community. Federation is precisely the communal institution and the best platform for reestablishing peoplehood as a universal goal for the Jewish community. We have the connections. We have the open table.

Kaplan warned us that Judaism in America had become reduced to going or not going to synagogue. He asked us to come up with better, more expansive definitions. He told us that before you believe you have to belong. Before you give, you have to feel belonging. Peoplehood, as an idea of an ultimate community, demands that we have obligations to a collective identity, not only for the purposes of comfort but for the meaning that comes with responsibility. We are blessed today that more people feel comfortable being Jewish ethnically; they are not afraid to associate as Jews. For many, it is a source of pride and has come to mean something important in American society. To say that you are Jewish implies that you are a person of intelligence and influence in American society, even if this is not always the case with individual Jews. But identification has to mean more than comfort with an external identity.

Identification with a collective entity also implies obligation. We understand the tension of comfort and responsibility when it comes to citizenship. Being American citizens means that we get to vote and enjoy

the benefits of a democratic society. We can take advantage of public school education and clean roads and sanitation. But we also know that being a citizen means responsibilities. We have to follow certain rules. We have to pay taxes. I know I don't have to remind any of you of that. We do not question the fact that being a citizen means both privileges and responsibilities, to ask, in a paraphrase of Kennedy's famous words, what we can do for our country, not only what it can do for us. It is a given. But in Jewish citizenship today, it is not a given. We used to stress only the obligation. Lately, we have only stressed the privileges. We have tried so hard to reach people from a marketing perspective to tell them that it's good to be Jewish, it's fun to be Jewish, it's even sexy to be Jewish but we forgot to tell them two things: 1) why they should be Jewish; and 2) that we have responsibilities to our people, our history and our future as Jews.

And "telling" may not be the most productive way of doing it...

We know that the proven ways of connecting individuals to the Jewish people—Israel trips, camps and day schools—are actual EXPERIENCES of being in a community. Why have we not been able to convince people of these two things—why be Jewish and that being Jewish involves taking responsibility? These questions do not have easy answers. I believe we haven't formulated a good enough answer to the first question, and it needs to be not just didactic but experiential. We have willfully ignored telling people that there are responsibilities because we might scare them off. In terms of the first issue, I cannot emphasize enough why it is important to give people a compelling and meaningful reason to be Jewish. In terms of the second question, even God has to convince Jonah—his own prophet—that taking responsibility is worthwhile and important. You cannot simply escape that which makes you feel uncomfortable.

We are naïve to believe that we can assume that every Jew has a reason to be Jewish or stay Jewish. We would not face the enormous assimilation rate we do now if we could answer that question clearly and

provide a practicum for it. If Mordechai Kaplan felt it was a burning question in 1933, how much more so should we feel it as an urgent issue over 70 years later. And in terms of scaring people off with responsibility, I think our hesitation to be more direct has turned people away. People take responsibility for that which they value. We just haven't made Judaism or Jewish institutions valuable enough to our constituents. As a policy decision, we in Washington came up with a plan that is simple and ingenious, in my humble estimation—not my doing but that of our lay leadership. We have taken on one goal for engagement. In 2003, only 50% of Jews in our catchment area FELT part of a Jewish community. We have decided to raise that number by 15% over the next ten years. We want more people to *feel* Jewish, not only join or support Jewish institutions. Practically speaking, that amounts to engaging 30,000 Jews who currently do not feel connected. We are not saying how to do it or what to do. And let me be clear. As we set out to change that statistic, we are not ultimately interested in affiliation with Jewish institutions—although that would be a wonderful outcome—we are talking about something much more profound; we are talking about Jewish feeling. We are talking about pride, about connection, about a sense of being part of something larger than oneself Jewishly. We really just want to recover the feeling of wanting to belong to the community, of feeling loved and cared for—even by people you've never met who simply feel that your Jewish identity is enough to be a member of our family.

When we do our next demographic survey, I want to feel that we have made a dent in Jewish Washington in terms of peoplehood, that in the game of statistics we have made considerable gains, and in the serious subject of Jewish community, we have something to show for our efforts. If we want to fill our organizations with new blood and a new generation of commitment, it will take a new strategy. As the saying goes, if you always do what you've always done, you'll always get what you always got. We want to reach higher and further than we have before. We don't want the same results we have always gotten. I have briefly outlined in general terms the outcomes that we should

strive for in the years ahead.

Desired Outcomes for Jewish Peoplehood:

- Connecting Jews to each other and to Jewish communities.
- Engendering the feeling of belonging.
- Providing venues for discovering meaning.
- Advancing the idea of responsibility to your family, your community, your people, and your world (in that order).

These may sound like relatively simple, non-ambitious goals, but in reality, they are mammoth—bigger than the fish that swallowed Jonah—in terms of the expectations they place on all of us in the Jewish community.

Jonah did get to Ninveh in the end. He did the job that he had to do but did not fully make peace with his mission. God was concerned that Jonah ultimately cared more about himself than he cared about the population of Ninveh. That's the inevitable outcome when we take responsibility only for ourselves and our own welfare and ignore the fate and destiny of others. We cease to care about anyone but ourselves. Mordechai Kaplan wrote that: "More dangerous to Judaism by far than challenge, opposition and even misinterpretation is the deadening acquiescence of apathy." The time has come for Jewish passion, for enhancing Jewish meaning. Without it, there is no reason for recruitment, membership or Jewish philanthropy. Over 70 years ago, Kaplan invited us to all become teachers of Judaism by being able to explain why Jews should be Jewish. I am repeating his call today. Kaplan believed that we needed to reconstruct Judaism to get to the end goal of Jewish peoplehood. Failure to do so would result in disengagement. He was right about that. Our affiliation rates have taken a significant drop. He didn't offer enough of a workable solution to solve this problem. But he did give us a metaphor for living Judaism. Until Kaplan was a teenager, he had no idea of the date of his birthday on the secular calendar. His family lived inside of Judaism, and he followed the Hebrew calendar, even as a citizen of this country. To use the Jonah metaphor, he was swallowed by Judaism.

He lived within it. When you live Judaism, you don't need the same draw to engagement. Without it, our jobs have become much harder. Before we raise money and build institutions, we have to build a framework of meaning and inspiration for the Jewish community. We

have to define and inspire a sense of Jewish peoplehood that goes beyond institutions, religion, culture or history. We need to create that sense of wonder and love that I felt about people I did not know, when I opened a cardboard box from America and found inside it a pair of Levi's jeans.

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Peoplehood: There's No There There

Jay Michaelson

"We're here to help each other get through this thing, whatever it is." - Kurt Vonnegut

In the old days, presumably, it was simple: all Jews belonged to *klal yisrael*, largely because they didn't have any choice, and we all knew that we were in this thing together. Some were religious, some quite wicked; some were honest, others deceived. But all of us knew that we were Jews, and that, to some extent at least, we were responsible for one another.

All that changed with emancipation. Now there were Jews who didn't see themselves primarily as Jews, who thought that Judaism itself might best be relegated to the dustbin of history. Others remade "Judaism" from religion to nation, even to race. Now we found, and find, ourselves not even agreeing what it is that unites us, what this Jewishness is, whether culture or nationality or religion or race. How can we hope to survive, the thinking now goes, if we don't even know what we're trying to preserve by surviving?

Enter "peoplehood:" the latest effort by Jewish elites to find some common ground between secular Israelis and Hasidim in Brooklyn, Jews-by-ethnicity from the Former Soviet Union and "cultural Jews" in Europe. As a member of Kol Dor, a network of thirty-and forty-something "concerned Jews" which has become closely affiliated with the value of peoplehood, I've heard the rhetoric. But I'm not convinced, either that the notion has descriptive accuracy or normative value.

I think "peoplehood" may be understood in one of two ways: positively, or negatively. Positively, it describes *something*, but we're really not sure what; it's what unites all of us Jews around the globe, but, oddly, we don't quite know what it is; it seems to have something to do with regarding one another as family, as a people, as *am yisrael* -- not a nation, necessarily, but a people. In fact, however, I think peoplehood is better understood negatively, i.e., by that which it is not: not a religion, nor a nationality, nor an ethnicity, nor a culture. Peoplehood is none

of these things because many Jews don't identify with them, and peoplehood is meant to be universal. Really, peoplehood might be best understood as devoid of *any* meaning. It says: we don't know what this Jewish thing is, but we're here and we're in it together.

In this negative sense, there is something appealing about peoplehood. It adds no normative content, and thus excludes no one. Each of us can fill it with our own meaning, and color it with whatever emotional connection we happen to have to bubbe's chicken soup, Philip Roth's novels, or our favorite hummus joint. Tea Packs and Woody Allen, *Avinu Malkeinu* and Milky pudding: peoplehood embraces it all, and, by saying nothing, includes everything.

Notice that any more positive definition of peoplehood necessarily leaves someone or something out, which seems to be antithetical to the radical inclusivity of the idea. Are we all united behind Israel as the homeland of the Jewish people? Well, not all of us. Do we all regard the Torah as the foundation of the Jewish faith? Um, no. "Peoplehood," though, is inherent in the concept of Jewish identity itself; if you bother to link your own cultural, religious, national, or ethnic self-conception with this thing called "Judaism," well, you're part of the project.

Very well, "peoplehood" unites, and captures, in a sense, the vague emotional attachments many of us have to Judaism and to our fellow Jews. But does it *do* anything? Is there anyone who gets out of bed in the morning, energized solely (or primarily, or even somewhat) by their membership in the Jewish people? Perhaps more importantly, does the value motivate anyone, *anyone*, to raise Jewish children, affiliate with Jewish institutions, or play any role in the ongoing drama of Jewish continuity?

Not in my experience. 'Peoplehood' is so vacant it's vacuous. Yes, it's nice to have a word to explain the inchoate bond between

me and a Moroccan-born shoe salesman in Afula. It does resonate with my own sense of kinship with these people, a kinship which endures notwithstanding our utter disagreement as to what the bond constitutes. But, as someone who spends at least half his professional time as a Jewish cultural and religious entrepreneur, I can safely say that "peoplehood" has nothing to do with it.

I am on friendly terms with just about all of the creators of America's "New Jewish Culture," and I don't hear any of them talk about peoplehood. Spirituality, personal growth, ethics, culture, history, kitsch, family, food -- all of these and more. But all specificities, no generality. We are 'doing Jewish' for a set of different reasons, and while it's nice that we are united in *klal yisrael*, that uniting doesn't carry any water. There's just no there there.

Nor -- and I don't have any statistics here, but I do have a fair amount of anecdotal evidence -- does peoplehood mean anything to unaffiliated Jews. Really, it only speaks to those Jews who have already committed, who already regard their Jewishness as an important, even central, part of their identity. For the rest (i.e., the overwhelming majority), the term is unknown and its definition is meaningless. Do we really believe that an unaffiliated Jew, who seeks her community in secular-cultural contexts, who finds her spirituality in yoga, who understands her 'people' in political or national terms -- do we really think this person will hearken to the call of Jewish peoplehood? Why, exactly? What is so compelling that it would cause someone to change their lives for the Jewish?

If we can't answer that question -- if we can't say exactly why 'peoplehood' would effect this change -- we should leave the word behind. I can tell you exactly why people become more Jewishly affiliated for religious reasons, spiritual reasons, cultural reasons, or communal/familial reasons. But 'peoplehood'? What's the appeal here? What's the point?

I suppose there are a few unaffiliated Jews who might love the notion of a people, a tribe. But surely they will experience that in terms other than 'peoplehood' -- religious ones, or cultural ones, for example. Indeed, if anyone really did affiliate Jewishly on the grounds of Jewish peoplehood, I would wonder at their motivation. If it means anything, peoplehood is closely related to tribe: these are my people, not because of anything we necessarily have in common, but purely because it's my team and not the other one. And to the extent that value isn't flimsy, it's dangerous. "My people"? Is that kind of parochialism really the grain of Judaism we seek to preserve? A dressed up word for tribe?

Absent more -- some notion of history, culture, religion, or community -- is peoplehood really that different from ethnocentrism? Sure, all of us should have pride in our "family's" accomplishments. It gives one a warm feeling in the heart. But it inevitably slides into an unequal weighting of Jews and non-Jews -- if, that is, it does anything at all, which I think it rarely does. Perhaps peoplehood would be worrisome, if it weren't so banal.

There are multiple Jewish renaissances going on, right now, around the world. New minyanim and new cultural Judaisms, new spiritualities and new post-Zionist political consciousness. New multiculturalisms, blendings, and boundary crossings -- as well as new fundamentalisms. It's an exciting time to be alive as a Jew, even if it's also a one of threatening transition, and possible partial extinction. But in all of these particularities, the generality is rarely in play. Is it important that all of these new Jewishnesses fall under a vague rubric of "this is my people?" Does the new label really increase our pride, or kinship with our fellow Jews? Or is it merely a buzzword, having meaning only within the halls of large institutions, full of sound and funding, but ultimately signifying nothing?

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Mitzvot of Peoplehood

Einat Wilf

I'm a member of the Jewish People. So what should I do when I wake up in the morning?

If I'm a religious Jew, there are quite a few mitzvot I must fulfill. If I'm a Zionist Jew, I should definitely support Israel (these days it often is a full-time job).

If I happen to live in Israel, I probably don't think about it much. Perhaps I even find the question odd – living in Israel should be good enough.

But what if I don't live in Israel? What if religious observance is not my thing? What if I want there to be more to my being Jewish than just that? Is there any meaningful content that belongs in my life by virtue of my being a member of the Jewish People?

Free from the Israeli-Diaspora Division

Peoplehood - the instinctive feeling that one is a member of one Jewish People present around the world - is emerging as the new Jewish identity for the global age. It is a new space that offers us the promise of living and belonging as Jews freed from the stifling divisions between Orthodox and Secular, Reform and Conservative.

It is a space free from the judgment-loaded division between Israel and Diaspora. It is a space for Jews living in age when identities are chosen, lives are made, and distance is dead.

But if Peoplehood is to become the Jewish Holy Grail of identity for our age, it must emerge as an effective source of meaning and guidance in our lives.

It must have content and depth. It must go beyond who we are, to become what we must do. It must say something about how to lead a good life in this world at this time.

We all need guidance and structure in our lives. It is our human need. But when traditional guidance is no longer relevant and old structures fail, we search for new ones. If we're truly blessed, we not only find them, we create them.

A Restless Nation of Innovators

So this is our great opportunity - to create new movements, institutions and ideas that will provide Jews around the world with structure and guidance suited for a global age.

It is our chance to harness the awesome power of science, technology, instant communications and cheap transportation to be one people, undivided, in a quest to fathom what it means to be human and moral in our time.

What are the mitzvot of Peoplehood? What should we do as members of the Jewish People when we wake up in the morning? What does it mean to be a good Jew in our time? Answer this question, and you square the circle of our generation.

We are a restless nation of innovators. Several generations ago, Jews in Europe asked themselves - how do we confront modernity? How do we answer the challenges of Enlightenment?

In their frantic search for an answer these Jews unleashed a wave of innovation and invention. They gave birth to new ideas, movements and practices that sustain the lives of Jews around the world to this day.

Several generations later Jews asked themselves how to confront the questions of Jewish statehood, sovereignty and nationhood. They too - Zionist thinkers and leaders - pioneered new institutions, practices, and ideas that govern the lives of

Jews in Israel and around the world to this day.

It is a remarkable thing: Jewish innovators trying to confront the challenges of their age by creating new ways of being Jewish, without which we would not know how to be Jewish today.

Will future generations say the same about us? The time calls upon us again to invent and innovate, to give form and function to

Jewish Peoplehood and to answer the challenge of a global age.

So here it is, the question before us: what are the mitzvot of Peoplehood? What should we all do as Jews, no matter where we live and how religiously observant we are?

Let's dare to dream far and high. Let's open it up for all of us to think about. Let's write and put forth proposals – crazy, big, bold. Let's start the conversation. I want to know what you're thinking. Please write back.

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Jewish Peoplehood

Barbara Lerner Spectre

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Anomalies are wonderful and terrible things. They are terrible, in that they threaten our given assumptions. They are wonderful in that they threaten our given assumptions and thereby expand the parameters of our thought and cause us to reflect in new and fresh ways.

What is happening in Europe today – most specifically in Central and Eastern Europe – is a Jewish anomaly that can allow us to reconsider and understand the notion of peoplehood hopefully with fresh assumptions. Perhaps the “otherness” of European Jews can help us to explain the “sameness” of the Jewish people.

Why should someone as myself, an American/Israeli be speaking on its behalf? For the last 5 years, ever since it was founded through a foundational grant of the Swedish government and the Wallenberg Foundation, I have directed Paideia, the European Institute for Jewish Studies. This has put me in the position of interviewing hundreds of candidates who vie to come to Paideia to study Judaism intensively for one year in a European context. It is the only program of its kind. It has put Paideia at the cutting edge of a pan-European phenomenon.

What is the anomalous phenomenon that is taking place?

While the rest of the Jewish world is facing assimilation and apathy among the generation of 20-30, in Central and Eastern Europe with that same generation we are encountering a striking and significant resurgence of the desire to be Jewish.

The collective profile of these people is that the iron curtain of religious oblivion mandated by Communism caused Jewish identities to be all but forgotten for 50 years. Then something startling happened: In the

early 90's, with the fall of the wall of Communism, the veil of identities also fell. Starting a decade ago, the Jewish past was revealed to a young generation. This happened in stunning ways.

- Sasha, a teenager was standing totally unsuspecting in her kitchen in Bratislava, Slovakia when her father told her, for no apparent reason, of his Jewish identity
- Denish in Budapest, was engaged in a ballgame when he called an opponent a dirty Jew. He was reprimanded by his teacher, who related the incident to his parents. The parents used this as an occasion to tell Denish that he must not do this – and that indeed – he too was a Jew.
- In the course of writing an essay about her country, Poland, in the mid-war period, a young woman questions her grandmother about Jews during that period, only to have the grandmother reveal, for the first time to her own family, including her husband, that she is a Jew.
- In Belgrade, a woman goes to her dentist, only to experience the Jewish dentist asking her to come to a new synagogue that was being reconstructed. Dismayed, she asks why on earth she would want to go to a synagogue, only to have the dentist reply “well, your last name is Levi.”

What is remarkable is what happens next in all of these cases. In each, the young people in question take a decisive step: they assert their Jewish identities in Europe. What is so very startling about the collective profile of these “unexpected Jews” is that the basic ingredients that normally make up Jewish identity are lacking.

Thus:

1. For the most part, these people are not known as Jews. Sartre's definition, that

it is the non-Jew who makes the Jew, in that we are known as Jews, is not the case.

2. They have no childhood memories.
3. They truly know what non-Jews feel about Jews since they were raised as non-Jews.
4. They are doing this in a context in which the price of being Jewish is high.

The stunning part of this collective portrait is that, although we would think that all of those factors would mandate against anyone wanting to assert Jewish identity in this situation, nevertheless, in significant numbers – in thousands, not hundreds – young people are stepping forward with a desire to be Jewish.

As illogical as their decision might be – we have in front of us a phenomenon that is critically important.

It is vital to the Jewish people because:

- We need a Jewish community in Europe. Israel needs a Jewish community in Europe. Israel cannot exist, both economically and politically, without Europe. They are necessary advocates for Jewish issues.
- We need their story. It is a story that inspires us with energy and confidence. As one of the Paideia graduates said: “we are the grass growing from under the ashes.”
- They can serve as marvelous informants. What is it that does attract them? What are the ingredients of Jewish existence that seem so irresistible? Perhaps from them we can distill valuable educational ingredients for the rest of the Jewish world. This is a critical question, because what they find in Judaism might inform us as to what the primary ingredients of Jewish peoplehood are: extracting those essential elements can also possibly inform our notions of what is needed for those that are standing at the Exit, rather than the Entrance Door.

Paideia has now addressed the best and brightest of this phenomenon of the unexpected Jew. In the short course of Paideia's existence we have interviewed

hundreds of candidates, and have educated intensively for one year 125 persons, coming from 22 different nations: Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Moldova, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Rumania, Russia, Serbia, Slovakia, Sweden, Switzerland, UK, Ukraine & Israel.

What do their testimonies say, and what must we give them to sustain them and nourish them?

Why is this taking place? What about Judaism so strongly attracts these unexpected Jews that they would dare to take upon themselves an identity that is so problematic, especially within the European context? Is it a curiosity, a loyalty to grandparents, an excitement with the different? What else could we imagine would bring them to a decision that does not seem logical to us?

Secondly, what must Paideia supply in order to transform their enthusiasm into substance? What is the educational format for these unexpected Jews – and what can that teach us about Jewish peoplehood? This enthusiasm to be Jewish, as genuine as it might be, cannot sustain itself unless it is filled with substance. What are the ingredients of the Jewish manifold that speaks to them?

Why do they step out as Jews? One element, one haunting, recurrent refrain in their testimonies is that many, if not most of these unexpected Jews report that when they are told that they are Jewish, they feel that in a sense they already knew it. It confirmed something that they already knew about themselves but were unable to articulate. That is a repeated motif in their stories.

Konstanty Gebert, a leading journalist and Jewish voice in Poland, tells how, with the fall of Communism, there was a seminar that he attended where someone had the idea of forming conversation groups. In the new atmosphere someone put up as a grouping, “Jews.” He went to the room, and found to his great surprise, all the people who were his friends – each, like himself, who had a

Jewish identity that they had never revealed to the others.

This story comes in variations. We shall return to that in a moment.

Another element in their collective profile: Over and over they say, "I am a cultural Jew." But what we mean, and what they mean, by that term are not necessarily the same. It is critical, though, that we understand what they mean by that term.

First of all, what they do not mean. They are usually not addressing themselves to the ideological dispute that quietly and occasionally vociferously rages: what is the core, the organizing principle, of Jewish life. For many, when they say that they are cultural Jews, they are disputing that religion is the substantive center of things Jewish. But, for the most part, is not what European Jews mean when they say that they are cultural Jews. When they say that they are cultural they are not entering that dispute.

What they mean by "cultural Jews" has 3 components – components that are rather different than what we might mean by "cultural." This is the good part of the anomaly – the part that can inform our own understanding of the parameters of Jewish peoplehood.

The first component has to do with the ambiguity hidden in the term "cultural." We often see that as being in opposition to religious as a defining notion, as a synonym for religious. This is not their use of "cultural." They are Europeans. They understand divisions between peoples as being divisions between languages – and further, they understand that each language is deeply embedded in its literature. Therefore, when they say that they see themselves as cultural Jews – they mean that they want to see themselves embedded in the literature of Judaism. *When they say that they are cultural Jews, what many of them are saying is that they are seeking to be cultured Jews.* The study of Text – and the penultimate Jewish methodology for studying text – chevruta – suits them like a glove. They take to chevruta with a ravishing appetite. The conversations drifting from the chevruta rooms are

astounding: what does this term mean in German – but in Italian it means something else. European Jewish culture is coming alive and being empowered through text.

It is the undeniable experience of Paideia that text is at the center of the revival of European Jewish life. This is what has staying power.

Secondly, they also see "culture" not only in the "high" sense of culture – as being literature and the arts – they also see that a culture in what we mean by the anthropological sense of culture: the rituals, customs and lore of the Jewish people. And this means as one engages in rituals and lore, not necessarily for religious reasons, but as one would attend a cultural event. They go to Chabad as one would go to interactive theatre or a cultural festival. As Eisen and Cohen (in *The Jew Within*) have pointed out, they attend cultural events of this type not out of a sense of being commanded, but as autonomous selves who pick and choose. Ironically, Chabad in its success has failed – for although it attracts people – it attracts them on cultural, rather than religious terms.

This has implications: This changes the notion of community as we know it. Very often their communities are episodic, event-driven, rather than continuous and static. This feeds into a re-visioning of the notion of community in Europe. Partly out of necessity, since many of the Jewish communities are very small in number and partly arising out of the context of post-modern societies, the notion of community within Europe will be undergoing re-imagination.

Since the context that feeds European Jewish life is basically secular in nature, many Jews do not understand themselves as Jews primarily in the religious sense. Together this forms a cluster of components that calls upon the European Jewish community to respond in creative and innovative ways – ways which, although they form a great challenge, might nevertheless put European Jewry at the forefront of global Jewish life and the redefinition of "community." Although community has been considered to be the

organizing social principle of Jewish life, modern means of communication and the choice-orientated individual combine to form the possibility that many persons might best express their Judaism episodically rather than through continuous community affiliation. The basic terms of community are critically in need of examination, and the European Jewish context might provide that challenging but fruitful opportunity.

For the third sense of cultural, and one critical for our discussion, we have to return to Konstanty Gebert in that room in Poland and his discovery that his life-long friends were also Jewish. What accounts for that and what does it point to? We should consider another notion of culture – a notion of culture that would justify why the study of text is so crucial, on the one hand, and yet on the other would see the study of those texts is in itself not enough – that not as an end in and of itself, but rather as a vehicle to something else – something that is so compelling that it is evoking Jewish identity from Europe that had all but vanished. That feeling of “I already knew it.”

We should consider the notion of culture that understands that term as a collective response to the dilemmas and manifold of existence. Culture as a pair of spectacles – a world view – as a prism by which to interpret life, and through which existence assumes significance.

With Judaism specifically, this prism, this world view, is very much tied to a master-narrative that grips the perceiver into the role of actor rather than spectator.

The marvelous dimension of this master-story, is that it can be understood in both religious and secular terms....in its most accessible, non-religious version, one version goes something like this:

- As opposed to Eastern spiritual systems, a profound restlessness, a determination that the world as it is does not have to be accepted. The religious version, based upon the creation story

which claimed that the sacred was above nature, extracting it from the “stuff of the world” to something transcendent, effected a crucial transformation of a world view, for it allowed the world, a world that encompasses slavery and suffering and illness – allowing it, even mandating, that it can be changed. That lack of acceptance of the world as it is – a restlessness reflected from the very first ‘lech lechah’ until today.

- A profound trust in the human mind as an instrument to perfect the world - an activism of the mind honed thru interpretation that validates the human endeavor. In religious terms, man as a partner, a “ben Brit” with God.
- A fierce, irrepressible faith in the Jewish people at the crux of this journey leading toward the improvement of human existence.

In its long existence, the Jewish people have for the most part clung to this master story with a ferocious tenacity. As a non-Jew, Paul Johnson, stated: “The Jews lie right at the crux of the colossal attempt to give life the dignity of purpose.”

Perhaps that is what the fellows are saying: I always knew I was different. To quote Joseph Campbell, “you live the myth.”

What does this do to the notion of peoplehood? Isn't this just a secular reworking of the notion of a special people that was addressed with a special mission of becoming a holy nation, a nation of priests? Perhaps so. But it transforms our notion of “peoplehood” - and forces us to consider that a corpus of ideas could possibly be at the core of not only maintaining but also inspiring the Jewish people.

It behooves the world Jewish community to be cognizant of what is transpiring in Europe– the remarkable phenomenon of dis-assimilation that is taking place there could well inform and expand our notions of Jewish peoplehood and Jewish vitality.

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Jewish Peoplehood Strategy? National Policy? Or Merely a Buzzword?

Ahava Zarembski

Jewish Peoplehood reflects fundamental Jewish concepts (Ahavat Yisrael, Kol Yisrael Aravim Zeh la Zeh, Jewish connectedness, Jewish interdependence) and is very real both in terms of short term relations and long term strength of the Jewish collective.

Yet, why are Jewish Peoplehood issues not approached strategically....or at all? To best understand this void we need to examine two watershed events which opened Israeli policy maker's eyes to these issues and marked a transformation in the Israel-Diaspora relationship:

- 1994 The AMIA bombing in Argentina killed 84 people; Investigators found a direct correlation between the bombing and Israel's 1992 assassination attempt of then Chief Hezbollah leader Sayed Abbas al-Musawi. With this finding, Israeli policy makers were given a major wake-up call —realizing the extent of their decisions on Jews around the world.
- 1998 The creation of birthright israel; Motivated originally in North America by a 52% intermarriage rate in 1990, initiators found a new “partner” in the Israeli government. For the first time, the Israeli government invested financially in a project focusing on the well-being of Diaspora Jews. But there was also internal motivation on the Israeli side. Ariel Sharon saw the program designed to bring 18-25 year old North Americans to Israel as a sure fire way to increase his dream of aliyah from the West, which would strengthen the future of Israel. For the first time, the various elements of Jewish policy makers and influencers converged with their own resources, needs and goals to jointly address a problem in the Jewish collective.

Despite these events two factors hinder the creation of a strategic approach to Jewish Peoplehood policy making:

1. The Israeli policy structure is insufficient in dealing with issues concerning matters of Jewish Peoplehood
2. The establishment originally designed to address the Israel-Diaspora relationship has haltingly approached change.

Factor #1: The Israeli Policy Structure Remains Insufficient in Dealing with Jewish Peoplehood

Since the AMIA bombing and the creation of Birthright Israel, there has been an explosion of governmental and non-government structures established to examine the notion of Jewish Peoplehood. Yet Israeli legislators still lack ‘on the ground’ practical and reliable resources to become versed in Jewish Peoplehood issues in real time. For all the matters of vital importance to Members of Knesset except security, the Israeli policy system is ill-equipped to relate to most issues with clear depth and knowledge that also adapts to the fast pace of the policy world.

In fact, the number one resource utilized for Jewish Peoplehood issues by members of Knesset and their aides thus far is GOOGLE. The Knesset MMM (Merkaz Mechkar U'Meidah: The Knesset Research and Information Center) provides historical and theoretical information, similar to the Congressional Research Service in the US, yet even this was only established in 2000.

Moreover, unlike other parliamentary systems, Members of Knesset lack legislative experts on their team. For example, a member of the United States Congress has a 14 person team with 4-5 legislative experts that focus on specific topics such as domestic policy, foreign policy, economics, defense, etc. In Israel, the average members of Knesset have two aides. Those aides are responsible for scheduling, media, security, economics, school strikes, and international relations –

they are tasked with building legislation on all issues – no specification.

It is impossible to build informed, in-depth policy with such a structure.

Factor #2: The Change in the Israel-Diaspora Relationship is not Reflected Reciprocally by Change in the System

The current Israel-Diaspora relationship was based on an exchange of letters in 1950 between the UJA President Jacob Blaustein and Israeli Prime Minister David Ben Gurion. The agreement emphasized that US Jewry and Israel maintain distinct roles: the US provides financial and political support to Israel and Israel “speaks only for its citizens.”

Many establishments were created at that time, “formalizing” these roles institutionally with hierarchical bureaucracies typical to both US Jewish communal organization and the governing Israeli socialist mentality.

Times have changed, yet Israel-Diaspora institutions have not adapted. The establishments are stuck in an antiquated mentality with people trying to maintain the old structure.

Then how do we change this reality? What does it take position Jewish Peoplehood as an addressed priority in the decision making process?

What is Needed

To address factor #1, Israeli policy makers should be supported by a system of “outsourced” specialized experts to provide them with real time information. Think tanks and policy papers will never substitute for the added value of face to face briefings and legislative aides. Briefings are needed that are up-to-date, based in the current reality and on Israel’s overall public agenda, as well as provided in real time.

To address factor #2, we need to streamline the current establishment re-orienting them towards specialization in order to maximize efficiency.

This will take visionary leadership, guidance, and funding pressure.

The new streamlined structure also needs to emphasize communication, transparency, and partnership involving all five of today’s philanthropic partners in the Jewish world: Federations, Foundations, Israeli businesses, the Israeli government (national and municipal) and businessmen and women from around the world (including Israel).

The increased involvement of Israeli businesses, businessmen and women is possible because many of the issues traditionally in the Diaspora reality are now needs in Israel –such as Jewish identity and education.

Every Diaspora project-specific investment in Israeli society should be leveraged against Israeli investments. It is also now the time, (and in fact is now possible) for funds to flow the other way – for Israeli private funds to be invested in global Jewish needs. The resources are there and an awareness of social responsibility is awakening among Israeli philanthropists.

For these reasons, The Yesod –Masad Initiative was born. The *raison d’être* of the Yesod-Masad Initiative is to respond to the current reality and to facilitate strategic, practical engagement in Jewish Peoplehood issues – to translate it from a buzzword to reality.

Responding to the inadequacies in the Israeli policy structure, Yesod-Masad provides real-time, in-depth information on policies impacting Jewish communities in Israel and around the world. Yesod-Masad has designed a model in which it is an “outsourced legislative expert” on Jewish Peoplehood issues, a model that can be used in other neglected fields of policy making in Israel, particularly relating to domestic affairs.

To address the aforementioned gaps and inadequacies in the traditional structure of Israel-Diaspora policy making, Yesod works with a new, broader range of policy makers and influencers – Federation and Foundation heads, Israeli businesses,

international businessmen and women, the media, etc. -- providing holistic, strategic support on Jewish Peoplehood issues.

What does that mean:

- Helping them understand one another and navigate through the different realities of various Jewish communities around the world and in Israel.
- Identifying partners with common ideas to prevent overlapping resources.

- Identifying Israeli businesses to leverage against Federation and Foundation investment.
- Providing real-time information on various communities in Israel and around the world – a type of “cultural consultancy.”

Yesod in and of itself is a reflection of and a catalyst for transformation in the system: to empower policy makers and influencers to make more informed, strategic decisions on Jewish Peoplehood. And to transform Jewish Peoplehood from a buzzword into a reality.

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Israel in Jewish Peoplehood Education

Alan D. Hoffmann

INTRODUCTION

The Second War in Lebanon – A Watershed Event

Last summer's war in Lebanon was a watershed event in terms of Israeli-Diaspora relations. Whereas five years ago Jews all but stopped visiting Israel during the height of the intifada, tens of thousands of Jewish tourists remained in Israel last summer, despite the war raging in the Northern region of the country. Out of the approximately 9,700 youngsters on short-term programs in Israel at the outbreak of the war in July, the vast majority stayed in Israel for the full duration of their programs. This represented an unprecedented vote of confidence on the part of world Jewry in Israel and in Israel's commitment to guaranteeing the well-being of Jewish children and securing the Jewish future. At the very same time, however, the traumatic events of this summer also demonstrated a sharp divergence in the life paths of young Jews living in Israel and the Diaspora. While young Israeli Jews were battling Hezbollah guerillas, their Diaspora-based counterparts spent lazy summer days at the beach or in the mall. More than anything, this summer proved that, even when Diaspora Jews feel close to Israel, their lifestyle and frame of reference is radically different from that of their Israeli cousins. In this piece, I will explore the complex relationship between Israeli and Diaspora Jews in light of this new reality and argue that Israel must play a central role in Jewish Peoplehood education if such education is to have meaning.

Modern Realities

The issues facing the Jewish people today are unprecedented. Barely three generations ago, Jews throughout the world, most of whom new immigrants, whether in the United States, Europe, South America, the U.S.S.R. or Australia, struggled for basic economic and sometimes physical security. These external threats, certainly in the first half of the 20th century, but even later as

well, prevented the Jewish community from truly confronting modernity and its impact on Jewish life. Today, however, while Jews throughout the world have achieved the basic economic and physical security they once lacked, an entirely new set of threats has emerged.

The Jewish community today has achieved unparalleled freedom and success in a very short period of time. When top educational institutions and commercial bodies opened their doors fully and removed quotas, the Jewish community finally gained access to the ultimate ladders of success. This mobility allowed Jews to occupy nearly every segment of the social hierarchy. In the United States, the Jews became one of the most politically powerful minority groups. In the economic arena, Jews have achieved the highest positions in a wide variety of professions, ranging from media to politics to business. The kinds of social barriers that existed just 50 years ago have fallen, and Jews today belong to some of the most prestigious private clubs, museum boards, and other elite institutions. While some anti-Semitism certainly still exists, one cannot argue that it poses the same existential threat that it did 100 years ago.

In under a century, the modern Jewish community has managed to realize many of its grandparents' dreams. In the wake of these incredible successes, however, new threats to the survival of the Jewish people have emerged. For the first time in history, Jews have the opportunity to choose to be Jewish. Whereas in the past, Jews were still identified and labeled as Jews by the outside society even if they chose not to affiliate with Judaism in any way, Jews today can "opt-out" of Jewish affiliation and identification completely. Being Jewish today is completely voluntary; as nearly every demographic study undertaken in the last decade has shown, many young Jews are choosing not to affiliate.

Over the last 30 years, intermarriage rates in the United States have soared, and today are well over the 50% mark.¹ On campuses today, over half of the Jewish students only have one Jewish parent.² Among global Jewish communities, only Israel has a birthrate high enough to lead to generate population growth.³

Beyond the shrinking number of Jews in the world, we are also witnessing a growing detachment, especially of young people, from the organized Jewish community. Communal involvement is rapidly decreasing, and recent studies show that although young Jews are often concerned with spirituality and their Jewish identities, the modern emphasis on individuality has weakened their interest in participating in organized religion.⁴ Whereas their parents and grandparents primarily formed their Jewish identities in the institutional and/or public arena, nowadays young Jews perceive of their identities as being far more individualized and fluid. Jonathan Sarna predicted this trend when, more than ten years ago in a lecture to the Council for Initiatives in Jewish Education, he intimated that the current institutions of Jewish life – created at the end of the nineteenth century as a response to the conditions of those times – may no longer be equipped to deal with emerging realities of American Jewish life.⁵ Indeed, over ten years later, contemporary Jewish sociological literature is rife with terms such as porousness, dispersal, detachment, religious individualism, secularism, voluntarism, autonomy, personalism and non-judgmentalism.

At the very same time, there is also a marked disconnect between Jews living in Israel and those abroad, particularly among the younger generation. In a recent study

conducted by Professor Steven Cohen, every indicator shows clear distancing between Jews living abroad and Israel.⁶ Likewise, data from the Guttman/AVI CHAI report, a comprehensive survey investigating the Jewish identity of Israelis, demonstrates that Jews living in Israel have become increasingly distant from their Diaspora-based cousins. Between 1991, when the first Guttman/AVI CHAI report was published, and 2000, when an updated version of the study was completed, the number of Israelis who "feel part of the Jewish people" dropped five percentage points, from 67% to 62%. Similarly, the percentage of those who believe that Israeli and Diaspora Jews have a common fate declined from 76% to 70%.⁷

This growing gap exposes the great danger that Jews, who have always held the notion of "One People" to be paramount, will grow into two separate nations – Israeli Jews and Diaspora Jews – possessing little in common. Indeed, the events of this past summer demonstrated that the life paths of young Jews in Israel and the Diaspora could not be starker. While young Israelis were engaged in intense confrontations with Hezbollah on the battlefields of Lebanon, their Jewish peers abroad enjoyed the delights of summer vacation.

Thus modernity, with all of its advantages, has created several problems that threaten the future of the Jewish people. Being Jewish today is voluntary. Being Jewish is but one option among many. Nowadays, young Jews need motivation to be Jewish; no longer does society force it upon them, and no longer is having Jewish parents enough to ensure that children will remain committed Jews. We know that the old model of Jewish communities, centered on synagogue affiliation, is not enough to attract the next generation.

The concept of Jewish Peoplehood – the instinctive feeling that one is a member of

¹ National Jewish Population Study 2000-1

² *America's Jewish Freshmen: Current Characteristics and Recent Trends Among Students Entering College*, a UCLA study sponsored by Hillel: The Foundation for Jewish Campus Life, 2002

³ NJPS 2000-1

⁴ *OMG! How Generation Y is Redefining Faith in the iPod Era*, a study commissioned by Reboot, 2005

⁵ Sarna, Jonathan D. *A Great Awakening: The Transformation that Shaped Twentieth Century American Judaism and its implications for Today*. New York: Council for Initiatives in Jewish Education, 1995.

⁶ Cohen, Steven M., *The 2004 National Study of American Jews*, 2005

⁷ Levy, Shlomit and Hanna Levinson and Elihu Katz. *A Portrait of Israeli Jewry - Beliefs, Observances and Values among Israeli Jews 2000*. Conducted by the Guttman Center of the Israel Democracy Institute for the AVI CHAI Foundation, 2002.

one Jewish People present around the world, a concept which encompasses all aspects of Jewish culture, including history, homeland, religion, spirituality, etc. – offers a fresh and exciting entry point for many young people. Not only that, but it is a concept around which Jews globally can unify. Jewish education has the potential to revolutionize and reinvigorate Judaism in today's modern world and build this idea of Jewish Peoplehood.

Education, in all societies, has the unique ability to shape future developments. Lawrence Cremin, former president of Teachers College in New York defines education as "the deliberate, systematic, and sustained effort to transmit, evoke or acquire knowledge, values, skills, or sensibilities."⁸ This transmission of culture across generations provides the broadest definition of education, expanding the borders beyond classrooms filled with children. Adults touring old synagogues in Prague, teenagers creating a mock Knesset, children learning Zionist songs from the 1930s are all examples of "transmitting culture." The Jewish community's belief in education stems from this expanded understanding of the word.

The transformative power of education lies in its ability to both provide knowledge, but also in its ability to inspire, motivate, and generate passion. Jewish education, especially, I will argue, with Israel at its center, is about the transmission of substance but also the deep experiences of culture. Education can enhance the feeling of Jewish Peoplehood and allow a young person to develop her own personal passion for Judaism and answer to the question of why be Jewish.

THE BARRIERS TO EDUCATION

If education holds the key to reversing the worrying trends mentioned above, then perhaps the risks are not as serious as I have posited. Yet education, of all types, in all segments of society, faces a number of serious obstacles. Particularly in the Jewish

world, these barriers threaten the viability of education as a long-term solution. For education to have the desired impact on shaping the future, three major elements are necessary: inspiring educators, compelling content and transformative experiences. These three ingredients are not only necessary, but interdependent as well.

Educators

Educators are entrusted with transmitting culture across generations, as well as knowledge of and passion for one's roots. Once a highly-valued profession in the Jewish community, education now occupies a low-rung on the occupational ladder. Education, formal and informal, plays an enormously important role in Jewish culture and tradition. The Biblical instruction to teach one's children, the annual telling of the Passover tale and the revered status of rabbinic leaders in our tradition all paint a picture of a society that not only valued education, but was in fact centered on the very idea that Cremin emphasizes - the transmission of culture across generations.

The modern world, however, has largely rejected the centrality of education, if not in theory, then in practice. In the United States, for example, teachers are severely underpaid, meaning that top-notch potential educators cannot afford to even consider the profession. Unfortunately, following the trend of the world at large, the Jewish world, "the people of the book," has steadily devalued the importance of teachers, in the broadest sense of the word. In fact, outside of the ultra-Orthodox world, children are rather encouraged to apply to medical schools, law schools, and business schools. Rarely do we hear of Jewish parents pushing their children to get a teaching degree. The Jewish world invests too little resources in educators. Day school teachers, Hebrew school teachers, and informal educators' salaries are not commensurate with the burden we place on them of ensuring the Jewish future. Moreover, there are not nearly enough quality institutions to train and develop formal and informal educators.

Materials

While inspiring educators are one important ingredient in exciting young people, they need compelling content to use in their

⁸ Cremin, Lawrence A., Traditions of American Education, Basic Books, Inc., Publishers, New York, 1976.

teaching in various settings. Curriculum development, in tune with modern reality and suited to address increasingly individualized needs, is sorely lacking. Traditional text study, while appealing to many, is not the answer for everyone. At the same time, today's youth yearns for meaning and substance. The Jewish tradition and culture is rich with a multitude of deep and important ideas. It is a tragedy that so few know how to access and enter into dialogue with these texts and traditions.

The Jewish educational world has not kept up with modern advances that allow for easy and efficient sharing of creative resources. The advent of technology provides a unique solution to the demographics of the Jewish people. With e-mail, videoconferencing, web logs, it is easy to forge technological bridges between Jewish communities and to share expertise. Beyond that, these emerging technologies form the language of young people today. If we want to reach unaffiliated teenagers and college students, we must look for them online. One needs only to look at the popularity of websites like Heeb Magazine or "Jewcy" to see that counter-culture Jews have already found a home. There is a huge unrealized potential here of which we must begin to take advantage.

Experiences

Stimulating educators and exciting materials, however, are not enough. Without the motivation to explore one's roots, young people can easily tune out the most interesting content. We need to create educational backdrops which engender passion and enthusiasm in all sectors of Jewish society. In a voluntary world, where one must choose to be Jewish, motivation is key. Without providing a compelling answer to the question of "why be Jewish," educators will be unable to fulfill their mission. Transformative experiences create the moments that waken young people from their self-centered reverie and stimulate the deep need to connect.

Educators, materials, and experiences: three ingredients necessary to engage young people with their identity; three ingredients which are often lacking in today's Jewish communities. I believe that

Israel can provide an answer in providing these critical resources.

THE MULTIPLE ROLES OF ISRAEL

I want to suggest that in the face of this crisis and these obstacles that Israel has a unique role to play in unleashing the potential of Jewish education in securing the Jewish future through building the concept of Jewish Peoplehood. As we rapidly approach 2010, an absolute majority of Jewish youth under the age of 25 will be living in Israel. No longer do we need to talk about the centrality of Israel in the Jewish world, for in just a few years it will be reality. Nor is aliyah the main issue. Young Jews can feel connected to the Jewish People and be inspired to lead Jewish lives wherever they may choose to live. The central issue facing the future of Jewish education from my point of view is in connecting the multiple benefits of Israel to the identity formation process of young Jews around the world.

First, Israel is a powerhouse of educational resources. With over 120,000 educators, universities, research institutions, think tanks, yeshivot, and experts in Jewish history, Hebrew language, Talmud and many more areas of Jewish content, Israel has the ability to have a dynamic and sustained influence, via these resources, on the quality of Jewish education around the world.

Second, Israel exemplifies the very idea of Peoplehood. It is in Israel that one can see the true diversity of the Jewish people and what it means to live as part of a nation. The experience of Jewish sovereignty, especially for prolonged periods of time, has a dramatic affect on many indicators of Jewish identity, behavior and belief.

Since the founding of the State, Jewish communities around the world have cast Israel as the victim, primarily for fundraising purposes. While Israel still faces many challenges to its identity and Jewish nature, the vibrant dynamic and growing Israel of 2007 now has the potential to provide much needed help to world Jewry. The connection to Israel is of utilitarian value in addressing

the challenges of Jewish life around the world. At the same time, educating young Jews towards a strong connection to Israel has its own intrinsic value as well.

Israel and Educators

The shortage of educators is a problem that must be solved both in the long and short-term. Ultimately, of course, the answer is for communities to grow their own quality educators who are sensitive to local needs and cultural issues. Globally, some regions have been more successful in this endeavor than others. In fact, in the fifteen years, since the Mandel Commission sounded the alarm in *A Time to Act*⁹ much attention has been paid to this challenge, and huge achievements have been made. Nonetheless, there are still major shortages even in large Jewish communities. Israel can provide an answer for the short-term.

Today over 200 Israeli teachers spend an average of five years in Diaspora communities teaching in local day schools. This is a number that could and should grow. Just under 1,800 young Israelis serve as counselors in Jewish camps—1,500 of them in North America. These counselors, who serve as informal educators about Judaism and Israel, touch over 150,000 young people every year. World Jewish education can also take advantage of the growing volunteer spirit among Israelis. This year, nearly 400 young Israelis served as volunteer emissaries through a program called "Areivim."

Not only do these Israeli representatives have a powerful impact on Diaspora Jews, but it is a two-way street by which they learn a tremendous amount about other models for Jewish life with the potential to impact on life in Israel. When a secular Israeli spends a summer at a Reform camp and is exposed to a form of liberal, religious Judaism that is relatively undeveloped in Israel, that experience deeply impacts her identity and world-view. In addition to the educators Israel can provide to other Jewish communities, world educators have the

opportunity to come to Israel and receive superior training here as well. Not only do they gain essential tools for their work, but they too get a dose of excitement and passion that will recharge them and allow them to return newly motivated to educate. These exchanges, something unique which Israel can offer, strengthen ties between Israel and Diaspora Jewry while also helping communities overcome one of the major barriers to Jewish education.

Israel and Materials

Jewish educators often talk about an asymmetry in the world of content. Israel has unparalleled educational resources ranging from books, ancient documents, artifacts, and creative curriculums, yet Jewish communities, large and small, find themselves lacking compelling content. As noted above, technology can deliver these materials straight to students, or allow educators to take resources and mold them to local needs.

To borrow an image from the world of technology, Israel has the potential to be a "server" for the rest of the world. Not only can global Jewish communities now gain access to the resources that reside thousands of miles away, but educators in Israel can also guide the use of this content and provide ongoing support from the comfort of their own homes. Imagine the world expert on Hebrew poetry leading a seminar on Yehuda Amichai for university students around the world. Cameras linked to the web can show Jewish teenagers the wonders of archeology in Israel while they sit in their classrooms in Buenos Aires or Berlin. Inspiring content can network the Jewish world.

Israel and Experiences

It is particularly in the domain of creating passion that Israel is uniquely able to impact the next generation. From 1948, unmediated engagement with Israel has had the power to motivate and inspire Jews. It is in Israel that Diaspora Jewry can sense for the first time this notion of Jewish Peoplehood and what it means to be part of the broader narrative of Jewish history. Exposure to the startling diversity, the rich tapestry of Israeli

⁹ The Commission on Jewish Education in North America, *A Time to Act: The Report of the Commission on Jewish Education in North America*, 1991

society, the modern Hebrew language and the use of Jewish time has a profound effect and provides an answer to the all important question of why be Jewish. Israel offers multiple "gateways" to Jewish Peoplehood and as such is the single most powerful resource we have in ensuring the Jewish future.

The transformative power of an Israel experience impacts young and old alike and provides a unique anchor for the concept of Jewish Peoplehood. Extensive research has been done to show that spending time in Israel can change people. Jewish education has to consider this transformative potential on all possible levels. Short-term programs including birthright Israel and summer seminars for high school students can have a tremendous impact on youth, precisely at key identity formation stages of their lives. Indeed, the Jewish community must strive to send no less than 50% of Jewish young people to Israel for short period of times. But this is not enough. Long stays in Israel have been proven to definitively strengthen Jewish identity and generate a long-term connection to Jewish Peoplehood.

According to a study that compared alumni of Young Judea's Year Course with those who applied to the program but ultimately did not attend, a year in Israel has a transformative effect on young people. Of those who participated in the program, 91% percent went on to marry fellow Jews, in contrast to the control group where only 48% did so. Synagogue membership is 79% among alumni, and only 43% among those who didn't come to Israel. Over 70% of Young Judea graduates have been back to visit Israel more than two times, compared to 20%. Those who spent a year in Israel were also far more likely to send their children to day school, volunteer in a Jewish framework, and to contribute to Federation campaigns.¹⁰

It is in fact, these statistics, combined with the growing concern for the Jewish future, which led to an historic policy shift by the

Government of Israel. For the first time, the Prime Minister of Israel decided to invest in the future of the Jewish people through a joint initiative with the Jewish Agency's Department for Jewish Zionist Education that will ultimately bring one in every five young Jews to Israel on semester or year long-programs. MASA: The Gateway to Long-Term Programs was launched in 2005 and serves as a gateway and platform for all semester and year-long programs for Diaspora Jewry.

Not only will MASA eventually bring 20,000 people between the ages of 18-30 to Israel for a long period of time and help countless individuals embark on their Jewish journeys, but it will help shift the cultural norm among Diaspora Jewry. Spending time in Israel will become as commonplace as synagogue membership once was. After completing high school, thousands of Jewish youth, from all denominations and backgrounds will come participate in a MASA program. Israel will become a core part of Jewish identity for a significant percentage of the Jewish world, uniting diverse Jewish communities around the world and inspiring young people to explore and own their rich heritage. By providing young Jews from the Diaspora with the opportunity to experience Israel as "insiders," rather than as outsiders looking in, MASA bridges the widening gap between Diaspora Jews and Israel, thus forging a true sense of Jewish Peoplehood.

Interestingly enough, however, the concept of Israel as a "gateway" into Jewish Peoplehood contains an inherent paradox. For Diaspora Jews, Israel is indeed a wonderful adventure in Jewish Peoplehood, evoking feelings of familial connection and pride. For Israelis, jaded by the cultural diversity in their midst, Israel does not automatically guarantee a greater sense of affiliation with other Jews around the world. On the contrary, raising young people who would more readily label themselves as Israelis than as Jews, Israel appears to increasingly isolate and insulate its own sons and daughters from the rest of the Jewish world. It is imperative that we develop concrete ways of translating the experience of "Israel as a gateway into Jewish Peoplehood" – perceived intuitively

¹⁰ Cohen, *The 1998 Young Judea Jewish Continuity Study*, 1999/ Cohen, *International Survey of Israel Programs Graduates- Preliminary Findings*, 2003

by Jews worldwide – into something that can inspire and motivate young Israelis as well.

Israel and Jewish Peoplehood

Beyond the ways in which Israel can serve as a resource for overcoming the serious barriers facing contemporary Jewish education, Israel has its own important, intrinsic value as well. If the pursuit of Jewish meaning is the core process of contemporary Jewish education, it has to be located within an intensified sense of Jewish Peoplehood. "I am a Jew because of my connections to my extended family." In this overarching concept of Peoplehood, Israel in its multitude of dimensions is not only a means, but also an end.

Those who remember the spirit of volunteerism inspired within the Jewish community immediately after the Six-Day and Yom Kippur wars know that these experiences helped shape an entire generation of Jews around the world and Israel. Last summer, we once again witnessed the power of Israel to ignite the passion and imagination of an entire generation of Jews, as young Jews from all four corners of the earth participated in

emergency fundraising drives to rehabilitate Israel's Northern region, initiated advocacy efforts on Israel's behalf and chose to stay on summer tours of the country despite the barrage of missiles which rained down from Lebanon. The traumatic events of the second Lebanese War reminded us that, even in an era often disparagingly called "post-Zionist," Israel retains the unique ability to light a "fire" in the next generation of Jewish leadership and forge indestructible bonds between Jews in Israel and Jews around the world.

By placing the engagement with Israel at the center of Jewish education, both as a source of resources and as a locus of intrinsic and unique value, Israel has the potential to provide much needed inspiration and motivation for young people to commit themselves to seeking Jewish meaning. Israel education, however, is just one piece of the broader struggle to deal with issues modernity has imposed on the Jewish community. Peoplehood is a unifying concept that can encompass all aspects of Judaism, and Israel education is the ideal "gateway" to Jewish Peoplehood.

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Your People Shall Be My People

Notes on Nurturing Jewish Peoplehood

Jonathan Ariel

Introduction

Jewish Peoplehood strikes me as one of those slippery terms that are a lot easier *done* than *said*. Many of us can readily retrieve moments in which Peoplehood was palpable. One example: in 1991, soon after the First Gulf War and the collapse of the Iron Curtain, I was a British educator working at a Jerusalem institute. I was asked by a Canadian non-profit to travel through Poland, Rumania and Hungary to study both about the Jewish communities there and about the transit stations for departing Soviets en route to Israel. Our purpose was to learn, so that we could teach Canadian visitors to Eastern Europe and Israel about those places, their history, culture and circumstances. Of course many of the Canadians had roots in Eastern Europe in the places we were scheduled to visit and there were many poignant moments of visceral experience. The transit stations were staffed by Israelis, mostly immigrants of long-standing from the very countries to which they had now returned on behalf of the Jewish Agency in order to facilitate the smooth passage of the Soviets. And some other Israelis on the trips waited their moment and then canvassed the Canadians (who were only too willing) to help fund the entire operation. Try and make sense of that scenario without Jewish Peoplehood!

What characterizes this incident is a number of shared notions: shared genealogy; shared cultural habits; shared memories and nightmares; shared family stories of uprooting and relocation; shared incredulity that this time trains arriving in Poland were bringing Jewish people to start afresh in a new society, rather than to a murderous end; and shared causes to join to achieve something of import based on a strong sense of identification, to name a few. In sum they each had fragments of a jigsaw that could only be put together collectively.

Thus whilst Peoplehood is not a word that is common in the lexicon in English or Hebrew, it does have salience in the lived experience of many Jews. If there was a share market for intellectual ideas and you had purchased stock in "social capital" twenty years ago, you would by now have made a handsome profit. If you are smart you will buy Jewish Peoplehood shares now.

As Robert Putnam writes: "Life is easier in a community blessed with a substantial stock of social capital. In the first place, networks of civic engagement foster sturdy norms of generalized reciprocity and encourage the emergence of social trust. Such networks facilitate coordination and communication, amplify reputations, and thus allow dilemmas of collective action to be resolved. ... Dense networks of interaction probably broaden the participants' sense of self, developing the "I" into the "We," enhancing the participants' "taste" for collective benefits."

A strong hunch says that even as we know little about it analytically – stay tuned, for the prevailing trends in Jewish identification will require us to be ever more agile at linking our disparate stories one to another – nurturing a sense of Jewish Peoplehood. These notes are a suggestion of what we need to attend to so that a renewed sense of Peoplehood comes to pass. I will try and offer some ways of approaching its potential significance for the Jewish People with an eye more to the future, than the past.

Rhetoric: A rhetorical claim of Peoplehood might well be evidence of its demise. Any time that a group has to keep reminding itself that it has a common language is often testimony to the reality that there is nothing shared. After two generations of intense political, philanthropic and social action many of the Jewish People's goals as a people seem to have been achieved. The establishment and security of the State of Israel; the freeing of oppressed Jews and

their immigration to Israel and elsewhere throughout the free world; the memorialization of the Shoah and the Jewish life that was; and the marginalization of anti-Semitism as a potent force in western society and culture – have all been remarkable stories of success. What shaped this period of vitality in Peoplehood were the pressing circumstances in which one did not really have to ask why, or what – because the answers were self-evident. This led to both Israeli and Diaspora Jews expending their energies on the how, not the what. There were many other intellectual, cultural and educational achievements in this period which fed some of the more sophisticated responses to the challenges but they were overshadowed in the rhetoric of Jewish public discourse by the immediacy and heroism of mass action. We need to be very wary of continuing with the vocabulary of previous campaigns (even dressed up in new slogans) because mis-applying crisis devalues our ability to call for support for a genuinely new cause. With a robust Israel and Jews living in freedom everywhere the language of Jewish Peoplehood itself will have to undergo change.

Errand on Earth: This period of frenetic activity was successful though to the point where people intuitively are asking – what next? Whereas the aforementioned "causes" to be joined were existentially prominent and lacking in moral ambiguity, one looks around for a similar kind of cause today that has a striking sense of clarity. The question ripped free from layers of analysis is this: *what should the Jewish People as a People do next?* That is not meant to be read as a "right to exist" question – that the Jewish People only has a right to exist if it has an "errand on earth," to use Abba Hillel Silver's evocative phrase. Rather it is meant to claim that for a vital sense of Peoplehood to hold sway the Jewish People as a people have to stand for something, and be working on a shared project, even if they are doing so in a multitude of ways. That is not a simple question and I think that one of the motors for addressing Peoplehood is that some are unsure whether there is actually something for us as a people to do together, given our tremendous fissures that are well-known and easily articulated. Might it not be that Jewish Peoplehood has been moved front

and center during the last two-three generations and that now, given the material successes, it can retreat (honorably) to a more supporting role and let clusters of Jews get on with life? I find this intellectually tempting, but emotionally and culturally vacuous. The cause of Peoplehood for Peoplehood's sake (i.e., that Peoplehood is constitutive of what it is to be a Jew) will require us to identify some major projects – that are mission-based on a prominent Jewish value and market-driven by the interests that we are able to discern across many of the sub-groups that make up the Jewish People. The insight that Jewish civilization contains both religious and ethnic strands that are profoundly intertwined is well known, and I suspect that the many attempts to rebuild Peoplehood will be more successful if they have a profound spiritual resonance. Only if we have overarching causes that enable many different Jews in many different ways to enter into some practical endeavor will Peoplehood flourish.

Globalization: Peoplehood can be propelled too by the pace of globalization. Zygmunt Bauman has called this era one of "liquid modernity" in order to capture the overwhelming sense that much of what we thought was steady ground upon which we were building our societies and institutional arrangements has in fact turned out to be far more unstable and malleable. We have gustily, and emotionally, sung Hatikva with its line "*I'hiot am chofshi be'artzenu* – to be a free people in our land." Yet, even for those that endorse the Jewish state, we are a measure less sure of what sovereignty can secure in a global world than we were twenty years ago. The movement in the capital and labor markets and the perpetual media spotlight that accompanies so many developments in Israel puts strong restraints on independent moves.

Furthermore, the elites of the Jewish People – the intellectuals, the wealthy, and the community professionals – jump on and off airplanes, work, holiday and surf the internet in all manner of modes. Bauman hints that this lifestyle allows such people to insulate themselves from the world by traversing it. The intimacies and intricacies of local community politics strike many of these people as hopelessly archaic and trivial.

They are intuiting that the Jewish People, as the world's first global people, might have a wonderful network to be cultivated. Yet the very same folks have often undermined this sense of Peoplehood and they share some of the blame for the tenuousness of the nation idea. The more Jews around the world, and in Israel, are active partners in the global economy – the more they come to share in terms of lifestyle, habits, and customs – yet the less they have to talk to each other meaningfully about as Jews. It becomes a movement of people who have a heightened sense of "me," without a balancing "we," at their core. The service they want must be "now," not "soon," without the patience to allow community processes to mature. The fraying of local community and the decline of our ability to talk in terms of: you "must," you "ought," you "should" – in favor of you "can," places us in a situation where for Peoplehood to succeed it must feed local community ties and bonds, and in turn be nourished by them. Globalization gives us the technological means to achieve it, as it undermines the social reality that can sustain it.

Thus one prominent impact of globalization is the undermining of authority. The powerful figures in our societies and cultures are (deliciously) the objects of satire and ridicule. And this becomes a tenable pastime because many of the most important and decisive figures in our lives are not visible. The challenge to authority has been termed "the death of deference" and with it goes much of our ability to say "you ought to..." carry a burden, help a neighbor, or sustain a community. Can community flourish only when people want to participate, or must it also have an element of commitment to share tasks even when people don't want to participate? Can Peoplehood thrive without local community? Can local community come to appear attractive without the lure of globalized community – in Jewish terms, Peoplehood? The organizational consequence for this is the move from centralized systems to disparate networks. Feeding messages and agendas from the top down will not be a viable way. Rather cultivating the constantly overlapping, multiple frameworks that lurch from one interest to another will need to be the norm. The architects and designers of

the linkages and connections will become the new nodal points in a dynamic sense of Peoplehood that stresses not centers of power, but networks of influence.

Culture: One organizational possibility that grows out of globalization stems from another significant feature of modernity: its impact on culture. Whilst we steadily move towards a more homogenized culture which spreads into ever growing corners of our lives the sense of particularity also rises. A generation ago we had "broadcasting" in the sense that there were limited channels into which to tune. Today we have "narrowcasting" as there is such an abundance of channels and media that only in rare moments of major political crisis or high sporting drama can we assume that a vast majority of the population are involved with the same event. The confluence of technology and globalization allows the fortuitous compiling of highly personalized culture, drawn from all over the globe. In these conditions there is an opportunity for Jewish Peoplehood, even as it makes it more unlikely that we will share precisely the same items, in the same order.

International Jewish culture is a potentially rich vein to explore. The multitude of web-based possibilities to share the consumption of books, films and music have the potential to build shared conversations amongst small clusters of readers and listeners. They can be turned into active interlocutors that spur friends and acquaintances to encounter the same material. Film festivals and book clubs, with their minimal entry requirements and episodic nature, can allow people to share a modicum of identification, even as they disagree on the messages of the cultural products. How new local forms of Jewish expression come to the international Jewish community is a whimsical process at present – is there a way for this distribution to be more fluent, given the technological means at our disposal?

Pluralogue: One of the chief features of the last half century has been the great concentration of Jews into a relatively small number of urban areas. The largest metropolitan communities account for a very high proportion of the entire Jewish world – and we are citizens of a relatively small

number of countries. So whereas Jewish neighborhoods are somewhat less dense than they have been, the movement in terms of cultural homogeneity to the west, particularly to America and Israel, is marked. Whether the implied downgrading of the current European Jewish population is justified or wise is another matter. Indeed, Europe is a strange category and in Jewish terms it is today a construct of international Jewish organizations, rather than a compelling reality for the Jews that live there. Despite this, given the roots of many in Europe there might well be a case for cultivating a shared sense of history through enhancing the status and sense of difference-but-sameness with Europe's Jews, if we want to cultivate Peoplehood. The persistent talk of Israel-American Jewish relations undermines the very ability to pursue Peoplehood – by stressing dialogue one emphasizes the duality which often leads to frictions and tensions. Yet, if there was a third voice in the conversation then a kind of pluralogue can develop that strengthens multiplicity and can unleash a nuanced sense of unity, without needing uniformity. What would the Jewish world look like if every summer camp, Israel experience and synagogue or school retreat made sure to include Israelis, North Americans and Europeans to stimulate each other?

Nationhood: The influence of nationalism and its structural embodiment in the state has self-evidently shaped the world in the last couple of hundred years. The very longevity of the concept of nationhood is probably testimony to its capacity to evolve and emerge anew in various circumstances. The literature speaks of the “primordialists” and the “circumstantialists.” The first see that there is a deeply grounded complex of cultural components that contribute to a sense of folk. It is robust and attempts to wish it away, or blot it out (that wonderful paradox of remembering to blot out the name of Amalek!), are neither human nor likely to succeed, because nationhood is one of the core human categories. The “circumstantialists” on the other hand see the constructed nature of the nation and look for the pressing and vital circumstances that brought a sense of nationhood to come to prominence at a given time and place. A

cursory glance at Jewish history sees both tendencies at play.

The situation is made more problematic by the distinction between civic and ethnic nationalism. “Civic” refers to national communities that are rooted in a shared commitment to a set of political principles and institutions; and “Ethnic” refers to those based on shared ancestry and cultural community. The first enables a multi-cultural or even a multi-national reality to develop, as people learn to speak two languages: the language of their own cultural/religious/national group; and the language of the civic community. The second stresses the common bonds and memories and that these should shape the public culture and domain. As sub-groups continually press for recognition of their cultural rights, and not only their social and political rights, then ethnic nations have two options. They may tend to move towards becoming civic nations, i.e., they further reduce the frequency, the prominence, and the sanctity of the culturally specific motifs that were inherited from previous eras. Or they may tend to endorse the motifs and continually sharpen their role in the public square, leading to exclusionary tendencies for those not part of the cultural lineage.

In our context whilst these matters are clearly on Israel's agenda they are not yet part of the global Jewish discussion. Were we to define the Jewish People based on the civic nation it would require us to build a *voluntary* commitment to abiding by a set of shared principles (that could well end up being tepid, if driven by consensus) and shared global institutions (that are/would be beset by governance issues). The challenges here appear to be insurmountable at this time. On the other hand, if we were defining the Jewish People as an ethnic nation then we have many of the in-built advantages of the Jewish story, as embodied and embellished by its sanctified festivals and cultural creations. Yet the single biggest challenge here becomes the identification with Israel – ethnic nations are those that are prone to the worst kinds of ethnic supremacy and are identified in so many ways as “un-western,” something which the overwhelming majority of Jews could not countenance. Many of

Israel's most fundamental challenges come from wrestling with how to be an ethnic nation that plays by civic nation rules. I cannot see how Peoplehood can thrive without a commitment to an historical and geographic anchor in Israel, and so we are in search of a model of nationhood/peoplehood that is in large measure *sui generis* for the Jews. What might that be and what does it take to earn Jewish allegiance to a unique phenomenon that is painfully difficult to practice?

Solidarity: The intellectual work of Peoplehood can benefit from a more sophisticated look at solidarity. If Peoplehood by definition requires a sense of "we" then we ought to have a wee sense of "we." Most western democratic societies are facing enormous questions of social solidarity and the inability of many to provide adequate answers in part explains why the welfare state is in such a condition of chaos. One of the causes of the difficulty is the growing multi-cultural nature of societies which, despite the many blessings they bring, undermine the "there but for the grace of God, go I" sentiment that facilitates a willingness to support those who fall on hard times. I think that the Jewish People is on the verge of being in the same situation. In what meaningful sense can a Haredi Jew extend the warm embrace of social solidarity to a committed Reform Jew? In what sense can a secular-cultural Jew and a national-religious Jew talk to one another so that a sense of solidarity may develop?

In Jewish terms, we are familiar with countless campaign slogans that rally us to give more, visit more, protest more, and write more. In recent times, the call for solidarity with Israel has often carried with it a stricture to avoid public criticism of Israeli policy and to toe the line in any manner of ways. One of the (unintended) consequences has been that a sizeable number of Jews – how many? – troubled by some of Israel's policies have felt the call to solidarity to be a call for endorsement of more than they can, in good conscience, support. Or they are asked to support the welfare of groups that deny their legitimacy. This appears to me to be a woefully thin notion of solidarity and it would repay us to deliberate on the concept and its uses. A

starting list to "thicken" our sense of what solidarity might be includes:

a) Same Boat Solidarity – think of the shock of recognition caused by some act (usually painful) that generates an immediate sense that whilst I was not the victim myself the event could have been directed at me. Think of the Netanya Park Hotel seder night bombing, or the UN Zionism equals Racism resolution. Jewish nerves were touched. We are in this together. The difficulty here is that constantly stressing how fragile Jewish life is makes it unpalatable. The psychologist Will Maslow once observed: "If all you have is a hammer, the whole world looks like nails." That is a pathological outlook. The whole world is not a bed of nails.

b) Family Resemblance Solidarity – think of the ease with which Jews seemingly, wherever they are in the world, begin playing the age-old game of Jewish geography. The sentiments and sediments of the family gathering mean that we sense that all Jews are far fewer than six degrees of separation from each other. At its worst it is suffocating. At its best, Elie Wiesel reminds us that:

"My father, an enlightened spirit, believed in man.
My grandfather, a Hasid, believed in God.
The one taught me to speak, the other to sing.
Both loved stories.
And when I tell mine, I hear their voices."

The stories and songs that are mine have their echoes in others. We may well recognize vast differences in outlook and values amongst our family and yet commit to working with each other to enjoin the issues, both those over which we agree and, particularly, those over which we differ (e.g., what should be happening, in my view, in regard to the disengagement from Gaza).

c) Cultural Folk Solidarity – here we Jews have an expanded set of customs and

rituals in which we all participate to celebrate and commemorate good times and bad times. They are shared markers and indicate what is worthy enough to fit into these two categories (e.g., Purim, Yom HaShoah), even as we celebrate and commemorate in different ways in various settings. As Robert Bellah commented “A true community is a community of memory, one whose past is retained by retelling the same constitutive narrative, by recalling the people who have always embodied and exemplified its moral values.”

- d) Particular Obligations Solidarity – this is notion that we, the Jewish People, lived with a clear sense of obligation. There are things that we **must** do as Jews – individually and collectively, and there are things that we **must not** do. We reach out to support those who are the unfortunate victims of natural disaster (e.g., tsunami), or inhuman acts (e.g., terrorism), actions which result from an unexpected calamity or willful act of destruction. We combine to endorse and realize some thing worthy that we cannot achieve alone and the beauty and dignity of the cause elevates us to do things differently (e.g., the Make Poverty History campaign, protecting the environment, settling the land).

These levels of solidarity increase in strength. What might be the scaffolding that will allow the mass of our people to scale the heights of “obligation?” One needs to maintain the balance between all four levels to ensure that the Jewish People can find their place at different stages of their lives. Rehabilitating the notion of Jewish social solidarity, with a parallel process at work on a more sophisticated understanding of pluralism, and generating a more nuanced understanding of what it means in a global world of Jewish difference is a paramount task.

Education: The time will soon arrive when educators are asked to devise curricula for Jewish Peoplehood. So it might prove useful to begin creating a list of initial questions that such an undertaking would have to include. Whereas the syllabus of many

topics and themes in Jewish civilization is brimming with content that has been elaborated in the yeshivot and/or the academies for generations, the topics of Jewish Peoplehood are far harder to discern. Is this a recounting of times when the Jewish People acted in solidarity with each other? Is it an exploration of the times when there was “groundless hatred” and the consequences of such actions? Is this a Jewish civics curriculum that all Jews study, no matter their ideological affiliation and religious commitment? Or is this a much expanded notion of Jewish Educational Travel that enables the lived experiences of Jews past and present in far flung places of the world to become the cognitive space in which all Jews encounter strands of their roots, and encounter Jews who ended up doing things differently, by choice or happenstance? What are the age-appropriate experiences for varying modes of Jewish Peoplehood? Is this in any way something that is educated for, or is it rather the potent outcome of encounters on a range of topics, and value-laden actions that grow out of highly focused particular commitments? Whilst this listing is by no means exhaustive, it gives a flavor of the issues that will have to be tackled in this regard.

In (temporary) summation I suggest that there are at least four interwoven strategies for attempting to pursue Jewish Peoplehood:

Jewish Causes – in this era we need ethically constitutive stories to animate Jewish organizational life. The stories I would seek would be ones of trust and worth that address ultimate questions of humanity in general and Jewish life in particular. They should provide compelling narratives that justify involvement and propel engagement with other Jews, including those with whom you have a profound difference, because the Jewish People stand for something. We have a role to play which grows from investigating our heritage through the prism of today. We have these stories in abundance in our heritage; so much of the work is in finding the resonance that speaks in the cultural idiom of contemporary life, even as it challenges that society and culture. The perennial themes of liberty, justice, solidarity, power and homecoming

can find their way in a renewed sense into our people's life.

Jewish Time – we have to mark time as many of the festivals and lifecycle events do so vividly. Jewish life has excelled at making these occasions significant. Much of life finds its poignancy at those lifecycle moments of birth, bar/bat mitzvah, marriage and death. In those peaks of emotion one's extended circle gathers to mark the passing into a different phase. It does not seem to be stretching too far to say that these are significant moments for the Jewish People too. What would it take to imagine new kinds of supplements (as rituals or customs) to lifecycle events that seek to place Peoplehood (and Israel) at the core of the gathering, so that the personal becomes intimately entwined with the fate of one's people?

Jewish Space – Jewish communities have always managed to build spaces in which they can flourish – the synagogue, the school, the welfare and community center, and now too the sovereign state of Israel. Given globalization, a relatively new mode of Jewish space has become available to us, one that is a cultural expression of this era: travel. Whereas there have been modest attempts made to provide guided tours and educational guide books, the field of Jewish educational travel has much to learn from the accumulated wisdom of the Israel Experience. For example, if Jewish communities around the world as part of their high-school and Hillel programs were to train local young Jews to be effective tour educators of their own communities, then visiting Jews would have an intercultural experience and expand their personal contact books, and the young locals would develop a knowledge and intimacy with their own community's history, culture and narrative. Such a project is based on a profound conception that Zionism as the Jewish Peoplehood project par excellence is about an activist entry into history. Whilst it has succeeded in drawing focus to Israel it has regrettably undermined the vitality of each community's sense of its own history. A more nuanced exploration of one's own past, situating it in a broader sweep of Jewish history, carries promise for certain key influential youngsters.

Jewish Texts – We can go out of our way to find substantial learning opportunities for Jews from different places to experience and study together. As a rule of thumb we should move away from dialogue, or *mifgashim*, as they have come to connote the meeting of two sub-groups; instead we should be looking for pluralogue with at least three different cultural groups represented. A natural laboratory for this is the MASA initiative where young Jews from around the world will come on long-term programs to Israel. This could speedily become the cauldron for mixing Jews, including Israeli Jews, in a variety of programs, rather than maintaining the "bubble" of segmented populations, as has been the pattern up until now. If the current target is 20,000 young Jews from the Diaspora by 2010, we can match that with 20,000 young Israeli Jews without adding any costs to the public or voluntary purse. Imagine that by 2020 hundreds of thousands of Jews in their twenties and thirties have friends and acquaintances from many parts of the Jewish world, derived from living, learning, celebrating and commemorating together.

Conclusion: Jewish Peoplehood is a shifting, evolving, dynamic sense that the sum total of the different parts is greater than its aggregate components. It sees a family resemblance between certain siblings, or cousins, even distant ones, rather than looking all the time for identical twins. It posits that you can make a claim on each other at a time of need, and that you have the potential for a different kind of conversation with each other than you do with non-Jews: one that is at turns warmer, livelier, more heated, more aggressive, and more intimate about Jews, and the meaning of life.

I do not think that the enterprise of Jewish Peoplehood is an easy thing to do, or teach, or even initiate Jews into, but we have never tried in the modern free world without a sense of crisis to deliberately intervene to cultivate such a sense. One of the first references to the *bnei yisrael* as a people came from the new Pharaoh in Egypt who did not know Joseph, the high-ranking governor. The Pharaoh warned that this people is strong and numerous. And indeed

we do know how to think and act in a peoplehood way when our adversaries are on the march. My sense is that in the last 20 years there have deliberate attempts to re-imagine synagogues, spirituality, education, cultural arts and their respective roles in Jewish life, but not yet a concerted attempt

to re-imagine the collective impulse of the Jewish People. Our challenge today is whether we treasure our sense of the communitarian character of Jewish life enough to try and cultivate it from within our own cultural resources despite the difficulties in so doing. I think we should try.

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The Federation Peoplehood Agenda: Toward Covenantal Communities

A Working Paper

Eric Levine

Introduction¹

Jews are the ever-dying people, only to continuously rebound time and time again. So wrote the well-known scholar Simon Rawidowicz in the 1940s. The current discussion about the apparent decline in ties to Israel and Jewish “peoplehood” continues an age-old dialogue about the significance of our connection to other Jews across the globe. As Federations, we have an opportunity to make an important contribution to this public discourse, by giving new meaning to the notion of Jewish peoplehood conceptually and practically. Moreover, UJC and the Federations can construct a meaningful and effective plan of action to enhance the commitment to peoplehood, in the Federation community and far beyond.

There is no clear or shared understanding of the peoplehood idea and for some, it is of diminishing or no relevancy. At times, peoplehood is used loosely in educational, religious, marketing, fund raising or planning circles to convey our responsibility to other Jews and our desire to build personal connections around the world. In our own system, we have often relied on a model of peoplehood and relations with Israel that is premised on emergency and alarm. Given broader demographic shifts, globalization, trends in affiliation, attitudes, perceptions, intermarriage, mobility and the “postmodern” Jewish identity (the sovereign self; see Cohen and Eisen, 2000; Cohen and Kelman, 2007a) as well as emerging patterns of philanthropy (such as Federation donor attrition and the growing role of private foundations), Federations would be

well served by an exploration of the peoplehood theme and to re-emphasize positive Jewish experiences, associations and motivations such as common destiny, love and community, rather than negative images and perceptions. Consequently, the Federation world would benefit from a thoughtful and sustained effort to reconceptualize our understanding of what peoplehood means in theory and in practice, and rethink the policies, positions and actions we take, the language we use in educational or marketing materials, and the ways in which we raise funds.²

Whereas the challenge of creating and enhancing a sense of peoplehood is of a global nature, clearly the role of Israel is central to the dialogue. For many years, Jewish communal organizations and leaders have assumed that North American Jews understood and embraced a connection to Israel. Israel has played a role in nearly all communal, synagogue and educational settings (both formal and informal). Tens of thousands of Jewish adults and teenagers have journeyed to Israel, discovering the people, language, culture, and perhaps most importantly, their own personal connection to Israel. Still, we can no longer take for granted that such a connection exists, to either the Jewish people, to Israel, to a common destiny or feeling of social responsibility to care specifically for other Jews in need. In addition, recent research

¹ Many thanks to Danyelle Neuman, Rabbi Louis Feldstein, Stanley Stone, Elaine Schreiber, Marsha Hurwitz, Donald Sylvan, Jonathan Woocher, Rabbi Jerry Weider, Einat Wilf, Misha Galperin, David Matkowsky, Robert Hyman, and the Large and the Large-Intermediate Federation Executives groups for input on this paper. They provided critique on various versions of this paper, contributed to its writing or provided important ideas in discussions on peoplehood and its potential implications for Federations.

² For analytical purposes, the peoplehood notion is being distinguished conceptually from a wider and more encompassing discussion of Jewish education and identity building, acknowledging the intrinsic relatedness of these themes. “Peoplehood” education is certainly just one part of the larger picture. This was not intended as a paper on Jewish continuity or renewal per se; the purpose here was to explore the idea of peoplehood in a more delimited way from a federation vantage point. The focus is also primarily on collective Jewish identity, while at the same time realizing the potential interconnections between individual and group identities. Indeed, it is recognized that an explicit concern for Jewish peoplehood must be embedded in a wider conception and strategy, albeit beyond the scope of this present effort.

and literature suggest that such a commitment of Israeli Jews to the concept of peoplehood also cannot be assumed.³ And, it should not be presumed that a strong peoplehood consciousness exists among fellow Jews elsewhere throughout the world. Similarly, the ideology of “negating the Diaspora” (shelilat hagolah) no longer serves global Jewish interests nor accurately depicts world Jewish reality.

The apparent decline in peoplehood connections seems to be accentuated among younger adults (Cohen and Kelman, 2007b; Kotler-Berkowitz et al, 2003). To illustrate, NJPS 2000-2001 data indicate that young adults are less likely to have been to Israel or to feel very emotionally attached to Israel than older adults. Young adults report that they are less likely to have a strong sense of belonging to the Jewish people. Only 37% of respondents believe that Jews in North America and Jews elsewhere share a common destiny.

A widespread decline in commitment to Jewish peoplehood has many potential ramifications. Arguably, if Jews care less for one another across geography, one would anticipate weakened political support and advocacy for Israel and a lack of concern and action on behalf of Jews in distress around the world. Community relations and social welfare needs might well go unaddressed, resulting in increased vulnerability of world Jewry. Fund raising efforts in the Federation field and other causes would likely decline. All of this potentially results in the increased vulnerability of world Jewry and threatens the security and welfare of the global Jewish community.

Perhaps a reason for this decline in commitment is the community’s inability to communicate a compelling narrative of peoplehood. This inability contributes to the ambivalence (or worse, irrelevance) many experience regarding their own sense of Jewishness. If nothing else, it is a lost opportunity to enable people to construct meaningful personal identities and communal connections. A decline in

feelings of connectedness to the Jewish people and Israel is certainly related to and perhaps symptomatic of a lessening (or even a transforming) of Jewish identity as well. Such declines become mutually reinforcing with the “bowling alone” phenomenon, portending a weakening in community, community building and social capital. And while these internally-directed ramifications are significant, a weakening of individual identity and communal – peoplehood consciousness also portends worrisome implications for the strength of community and thereby the capacity of the Jewish people to pursue its universal vision of social justice. In the spirit of the eminent French Jewish philosopher Emanuel Levinas (1905 – 1995) who wrote that Judaism and Jews are necessary to the world, the quality of total human existence is uplifted through the distinctive mission, role and contribution of the Jewish people and Judaism itself; hence our commitment to ensuring the continuity of Judaism and the active engagement of Jews. And, to accomplish that sacred task, it can be maintained, Jews need each other.

On the most basic level, then, it is argued here that connection to Jewish peoplehood is vital to Jewish survival and its distinctive vision, mission and message. Indeed, there is an intrinsic connection among peoplehood, identity and Israel, each implying the other. We must redouble efforts and reinforce that Jews world-wide view one another as brothers and sisters with a common “covenant of fate and destiny (discussed below).” Deepening the consciousness of peoplehood among Jews world-wide must be a priority item on the international Jewish agenda and a wide range of organizations need to develop their shared understandings, interests and a collaborative action program.

³ See the Kol Dor web site for discussion of this theme: www.koldor.org.

peoplehood: peo-ple-hood (pē'pəl-hōd)
n. The condition of being a people or one of a people: "As symbols go, few are as national and sectarian as the menorah. It is the symbol of Jewish peoplehood" (Charles Krauthammer - Obtained from www.dictionary.com; definitions listed are from The American Heritage® Dictionary of the English Language, Fourth Edition)

Attempting a Federation Understanding

Although the concern for peoplehood may be a "contemporary" issue, the idea of the existence of a distinctive Jewish people or peoplehood is biblical in origin. Throughout the Torah, Prophets and Writings, Jews are variously referred to as a congregation, a nation, children of Israel or even a kingdom, all implying a connection among people. A number of source texts teach and emphasize the notion of Jewish peoplehood and the everlasting bond we have with the land of Israel (see Appendix II). We are taught that "All of Israel is responsible for one another" (Talmud Shevuot 39a) and to save a life (Jewish or otherwise, according to different versions) is to save an entire world (Talmud Sanhedrin 37a). Our love for and commitment to Israel is captured in Psalm 137:5: "If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand wither." And the Torah is full of references to an everlasting divine covenant that spans generations, centered in a land that was given as an everlasting possession. Perhaps the moving phrase from Isaiah 42:6 summarizes the entire conversation: "I am God that summoned you through justice, and I have grasped you by the hand, I have created you and appointed you to be a covenant people, a light unto the nations."

In addition, an extensive historical literature on peoplehood exists and a growing body of recent scholarly and popular writings is emerging. These writings often identify various components of a connection to peoplehood, including affective (feeling), cognitive (knowledge and intellectual acceptance), and behavioral (concrete action on a personal and collective level) characteristics.

At its most fundamental, the *raison d'être* of the Federation movement has been the

unquenchable commitment to the unity and totality of the Jewish people, or "k'lal Yisrael," and a deep devotion to a responsibility to care for others, or "arevut." Indeed, the old annual campaign slogan "We are One" gave testimony to that commitment. According to Kol Dor, "Jewish Peoplehood (Amiyut Yehudit) is the concept that each Jew, whether by birth or by choice, is connected through a shared responsibility for, and a shared history and destiny with, every other Jew."⁴ Or, as sociologist Ezra Kopelowitz indicates in his Peoplehood Research Blog, "Jewish peoplehood occurs when face-to-face social interactions between Jews are structured in such a way, that they enable the possibility of interaction with other Jews who are not immediately present."⁵

Drawing from these sources, a simple provisional working understanding of peoplehood for Federation use can now be offered: to strengthen ties among Jews across time and geography. At least at this stage, this provides a simple, sound working definition that casts a wide net to encompass the affective, cognitive and behavioral expressions of peoplehood, and implies the action imperative so basic to the Federation mission.

There is another concept that can also serve to deepen the thinking about peoplehood and root the discussion in core Jewish texts, concepts and values. The late Daniel Elazar, founder of the Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs described a distinctive Jewish political tradition dating back to biblical days. In short, Elazar teaches that the Jewish people and polity are organized around the notion of a covenant, vertically and horizontally.

The covenantal paradigm is a recurring theme in our literature as well as in the way we have historically structured and enacted community and organizations. Cases abound in our sacred and historical texts recounting our encounters with covenantal

⁴ Kol Dor, retrieved from <http://www.koldor.org/inb.php?ct=cor&tm=Overview>.

⁵ Kopelowitz, E. Peoplehood Research Blog. Retrieved from <http://www.researchsuccess.com/blog/default.asp?Category=3>,

relationships (i.e., with Noah, with Abraham, with the entire people at Sinai, with King David, with various Prophets, and on Purim). In these cases, the emerging covenant required both parties to do or agree to something, and the covenant was validated with a tangible sign, such as a rainbow, circumcision or the Torah itself.

Covenant, or in Hebrew “brit” connotes the sense of to cut out, to carve as in a ring, a chain or a circle. This brit implies a solemn oath or injunction; that is, to enter into a ring or chain, implying also a promise of fidelity.

For Elazar, a covenant or brit creates a perpetual bond between parties having independent but not necessarily equal status. That bond is based upon mutual obligations and a commitment to undertake joint action to achieve certain defined ends. Covenants are founded under conditions of mutual respect that seek to protect the fundamental integrity and uniqueness of all parties involved. Covenants connote mutual responsibility. They are long-term in nature, with no pre-set time limits. Indeed, covenants are expected to last forever.

Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik offered an extension of the covenantal idea that may be useful for how Federations define and implement their understanding of peoplehood/covenant. Soloveitchik distinguishes between two historical Jewish covenants made with God: a “brit goral,” or covenant of fate and a “brit yi’ud,” the covenant of destiny. The former covenant was made while the Jews were still enslaved in Egypt, whereas the second was made after their liberation. A covenant of fate is based on recognition of four factors:

1. Shared historical circumstances
2. Shared suffering
3. Shared responsibility and liability
4. Shared activity

As opposed to the covenant of fate, which was made with a slave people who lacked free will, the covenant of destiny was made with a free nation which could, and did, make up its own mind. Fate is uncontrollable, destiny can be directed; it is proactive commitment and action. For the contemporary Jew, who may have suffered

through little of what might constitute an experience of fate, the covenant of destiny represents a new paradigm that can create a greater connection to the whole. The covenant of destiny is predicated on the following core concepts:

1. Collective possibility
2. Collective responsibility
3. Collective identity

Rabbi Irving “Yitz” Greenberg writes that the heart of Judaism is a vision of perfection. But perfection cannot be achieved in or by any one generation. The covenant, then, becomes a treaty that is shared between generations. Each one will have to do its part and then pass it on to the next for further improvement and refinement. To implement the covenant, the Jewish people have formed a covenantal community, through which each of us overcomes the isolation of being a solitary person and gains links to all other living Jews. Through covenantal community, each generation also overcomes the isolation of the current moment and gains links to other generations, past and future. For Greenberg, the covenant is the plan to realize perfection in actual history.

Taking lessons from the above scholars and texts,⁶ in many ways the Federation exemplifies the peoplehood vehicle par excellence, in both purpose and action, in both means and ends. Indeed, the historic Federation mandate to save, rescue, and care for Jews and strengthen Jewish life, by definition equals a peoplehood agenda and enacts covenantal responsibility and opportunity. In addition, the covenantal paradigm provides rich terminology and concepts to root our work in a more compelling understanding and vision. Indeed, if as recent scholarship suggests (Cohen and Eisen, 2000, among others), that contemporary North American Jews both seek and respond to messages of meaning and purpose, federations can utilize the notions of dreams of perfection, collective possibility, responsibility and

⁶ There are many other scholars who have also written extensively and compellingly on the covenant theme. The philosopher – theologians Eugene Borowitz and David Hartman are two preeminent examples.

identity and covenant to conceptualize their work and therefore present a more compelling vision to our communities.

Peoplehood serves as one of the many possible portals for individuals to connect to Judaism and the community. It links Jews with common history, culture, values and future (i.e., mission). In many ways, it embodies the idea of an extended family of people sharing connection and mutual responsibility. It also represents a collective aspect of one's personal identity, linking the individual to others and to something larger beyond oneself. And because Jewish life is pluralistic in nature, peoplehood also is able to encompass and unify the diversity of Jewish expression. Finally, peoplehood captures the idea of a global community of purpose, dedicated to caring, inspiring and connecting.⁷

Just as biblical covenants were confirmed through physical deeds, agreements or statements, so too the work of the Federation can be interpreted as consisting of covenantal deeds. To illustrate, the act of giving to the Campaign, through face to face solicitation or by signing a pledge card, is a covenantal act that connects the donor and solicitor to the Jewish people. Likewise, participation on an allocations committee or an overseas mission constitute covenantal deeds linking participants and the Federation to Jewish purpose, vision, values and dreams, and to the Jewish people, past, present and future.

The notion of Federations as covenantal communities suggests new ways of thinking about how Federations view and work with their local communities, how Federations relate to and work with one another and UJC (i.e., Federations covenanted to one another in mutual responsibility and perpetual relation) and how our continental system relates to the global Jewish people, Israel and elsewhere.⁸ Federations, as covenantal

communities and partners, represent proactive commitment and action. They are the fulfillment of the covenant of destiny, embodying and operationalizing collective possibility, collective responsibility and collective identity. Even more, the Federations are one critical action component of Judaism's dream to achieve perfection in the world.

Conclusion

The foregoing discussion has argued for a new conceptual understanding of the work of Federations in the light of the current peoplehood discourse, drawing from the covenantal paradigm. In the thoughtful words of two colleagues, Jacob Solomon and Ted Sokolsky, peoplehood can be viewed as the organizing and unifying principle of federation life. But, if the discussion remains merely at the conceptual level, without the pragmatic, the exploration would be incomplete. In sum, for Federations our objective is to rethink basic goals, objectives and activities in light of these concerns and develop a peoplehood "campaign" or plan of action that can be implemented on the local, continental and international levels (please see Appendix II for proposed areas of intervention). At the same time, the UJC/Federation system should be engaging with a wide range of potential partners in order to mobilize the broader community around the peoplehood agenda. Ultimately, the purpose of such an agenda, beyond the conceptual, is to raise awareness, deepen knowledge, and inspire action-oriented commitment to Israel and Jewish peoplehood and the crucial connection between them, especially among younger adults. We will need to determine how we educate and inspire feelings for peoplehood in new and compelling ways and enable those feelings to be actualized in our organizations and the community at large. These objectives dovetail with our broader goals of deepening Jewish identity, education, growing community and transforming our engagements with our constituencies into uplifting sacred moments of inspiration and passion, meaning and

⁷ Galperin, M. (August 2007). Jewish peoplehood: From theory to implementation. LIFEXECS Institute, La Jolla, CA. United Jewish Communities.

⁸ The notion of Federations as covenantal organizations and covenanted communities, stressing the peoplehood connections is very much in step with UJC's recent emphasis on the collaborative model of Federations. Similarly, there are clear conceptual and practical links

with recent work by UJC on the Federation role in "linking the silos" and becoming "welcoming communities." While a fruitful and necessary exploration that deserves extended treatment, that discussion is beyond the scope of the current paper.

fulfillment, and connection to the Jewish community and people.

The Federation family has had an historical commitment to Israel and Jewish peoplehood as well as a desire to deepen Jewish meaning and affiliation. This commitment is embedded in our collective dream to create inspired, vibrant Jewish communities and to enrich and strengthen Jewish life and communities in North America, Israel and around the world, based

on Torah (learning), tzedek (justice), chesed (caring and compassion), avodah (service) and tikun olam (ethics and repairing the world). We have an opportunity to respond to the significant challenges described earlier and to chart out a direction for our organizations to follow. We can play a pivotal role in identifying and defining these issues, establishing priorities, educating and convening key players and mobilizing action, and leveraging the resources to enable us to advance this crucial agenda.

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Appendix I

“Sample” Peoplehood Action Agenda: Local, Continental and International UJC, the Federations and Our Partners

A potential Federation action agenda around the peoplehood issue conceivably can encompass a wide range of tactics, almost without end. A broad effort would set as its goal increased affective, cognitive and behavioral responses regarding Israel and peoplehood connections. Specifically, that means to find ways of connecting Jews to each other and to Jewish communities, to engender the feeling of belonging, to provide venues for discovering meaning, to enable more Jews to do Jewish with other Jews and to advance the idea of responsibility to one’s family, community, people and the world.

Given inherent resource limitations, the task is to develop a feasible plan based on concrete and measurable goals and objectives. The list that follows is intended merely as a starting point and provides sample action items to stimulate discussion, the creation of new ideas and decision making. Additional reference should be made to the work plan document of the Jewish Peoplehood and Identity department of UJC, which is already working on the peoplehood agenda and is addressing a number of the suggested initiatives appearing below.

Provide Education - Raise Awareness (changing attitudes and perceptions)

- Continued dialogue within the Federation and wider community on the issue of peoplehood and its conceptual and practical implications for our organizations and work
- Produce or commission and disseminate articles, papers, books/monographs, interviews
- Increase education programs regarding Israel and peoplehood in schools, camps, youth programs, early childhood, synagogues, study groups, salons, reading groups; modify current curricula at all levels and programs
- Increase public attendance at festivals and cultural events
- Conduct a peoplehood “PR” effort in the media (i.e., PSAs, ads, etc.)

Review Communications/Marketing Language and Messages

- Change Federation language to reflect peoplehood thrust (either reemphasizing existing hot buttons we can use or develop new language): marketing

materials, web page content & links, campaign literature, brochures, e mails, communications, press releases, speeches, solicitations, training, retraining and retooling speakers' bureaus, etc.

Reframe Development Strategies

- In line with overall marketing and language changes, ensure fund raising case and messages are linked to peoplehood issue (i.e., the ways in which we promote the annual campaign, such as solicitations, speeches, solicitor training, educational programs, etc.).
- Link theme to broadening the base strategies; increase donor base, data base and campaign results

Expand Federation Planning/Allocations Role

- Ensure that all Federations have Israel Experience function to promote meaningful peoplehood engagement, overseas trips, and "mifgash"
- Encourage updating of community mapping of Israel and peoplehood-related programs and initiatives
- Promote increased Federation funding for overseas through allocations and supplemental giving
- Promote increased funding for birthright, Otzma, MASA and other Israel Experience programs

Redesign Overseas Engagement and Missions

- Work to increase participation in birthright, Otzma, MASA and Israel experience programs and participation in "global" volunteer service programs
- Examine the way missions are conducted, to ensure that the message of peoplehood and Israel are not only emphasized but presented in a deeper, more effective fashion, including but not limited to: pre-mission orientations; trip content (site visits; sessions; training; destinations; materials; language of chair, staff, guides, speakers, and dignitaries; how campaign messages and solicitations are communicated), post-mission follow-up, etc.

- Examine new ways to achieve "Mifgash:" international, triangulated community partnerships; multi-lateral roundtable contacts, experiences and relationships; specific engagement projects for schools, youth (i.e., technology based international e- pal program, increased participation in student exchange programs, Jewish overseas study programs to Jewish destinations); study/mifgash missions (non-fund raising) to new locations

Develop Wide Range of Collaborations & Programming

- Engage Federation system partners, foundations and other sister agencies to develop broad agenda
- Invest in global social justice- Jewish service learning (term of service) programs
- Increase number of peoplehood-trained educators and professionals in all walks of communal organizations: teachers, youth workers, camp professionals, campaign, center professionals, etc.
- Develop and disseminate peoplehood curricular materials for a full year of courses at all levels of Jewish day schools
- Ensure peoplehood content in range of formal and informal educational efforts across organizational systems
- Develop peoplehood curricula geared to congregational education
- Develop a congregational model for "mifgash:" inter-synagogue or community connections
- Promote 40th anniversary of Soviet Jewry movement: Shabbat Chanukah 2007
- Promote Israel@60 celebrations
- Promote Jewish Social Action Month: national Jewish service - mitzvah day/month
- Promote next generation initiatives (peer driven; personalized, shared interests) that stress immersion/Jewish travel; entrepreneurship; social networking
- Reinvigorate youth movements
- Reinvigorate Hebrew education
- Explore use of new technology to promote peoplehood connections

**Excerpts from “Toward a Jewish People Policy” by Yehezkel Dror
Haaretz July 9, 2007**

Retrieved from <http://www.haaretz.com/hasen/spages/876345.html>

- Developing core curricula in Jewish and Jewish People studies, to be shared by Israel and the Diaspora, with care being taken to offer a range of options so as to accommodate value diversity.
- Inclusion of programs offering an understanding of the Jewish People and its dynamics in the mass media.
- A radical change in the conception of aliyah, with encouragement of partial aliyah, including multiple residences in Israel and the Diaspora.
- Substantive consultation with Diaspora leaders on Israeli decisions of importance to the Jewish People as a whole, with cautious movement toward establishing a "consultative Jewish People council" related to the Knesset, which is entitled to prepare advisory opinions, and is composed of representatives of the Diaspora.
- Explicit and declared recognition of the right of Jews in the Diaspora to criticize Israeli policies.
- New modalities for Jewish investments in Israel, combining profitability with expression of solidarity.
- Shared challenging projects, including tikkun olam ("repair of the world") activities.
- Strengthening of identification symbols and shared centers, such as by making Jerusalem into the cultural capital of Judaism and the Jewish People.
- Setting up in Jerusalem a Jewish People leadership academy, to enable shared study and discourse by Israeli and Diaspora leaders, with special attention to younger ones.
- Deepening the nature of Israel as a "Jewish state" and making it more visible.

Professor Yehezkel Dror is the Founding President of the Jewish People Policy Planning Institute (JPPPI), Professor of Political Science at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, a member of the Club of Rome, scholar and international advisor on statecraft, governance, and policy planning and is the author of many articles and books in seven languages.

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| Appendix II |
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Classical Terms of Jewish Peoplehood

- Am: Nation, People
- Amiyut Yehudit: the Jewish people
- Beit Yisrael: House of Israel
- Bnai Yisrael: Children of Israel
- Brit: Covenant
- Edah: Community or Congregation
- Goy: Nation
- Kahal: Community or Congregation
- Kehilah: Community or Congregation
- Klal Yisrael: The totality of the Jewish people
- Knesset Israel: Assembly of Israel
- Le'um: Nation or people
- Medinah: Nation
- Mahaneh: camp
- Mamlechet kohanim: kingdom of priests
- Mateh: tribe, family
- Shevet: tribe, clan, family

Biblical References

Genesis 12:2

“And I will make of you a great nation (goy).”

Genesis 17:7-9

“And I will establish my covenant between me and you and your seed after you in their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be a God to you, and to your seed after you. And I will give to you and to your seed after you, the land in which you sojourn, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession.”

Exodus 19:6

“A kingdom of priests (mamlechet kohanim) and a holy nation (goy)”

Deuteronomy 4:6

“A wise and insightful people (am), this great nation (goy).”

Deuteronomy 6:4

“Shma Yisrael 'H Elokeinu 'H Echad: Hear O Israel (collective responsibility), the Lord is Our God (shared history and faith), the Lord is One (shared purpose - bringing monotheism to the world).

Deuteronomy 29: 9-15

“You stand this day all of you before the Lord your God; your captains of your tribes, your elders, and your officers, with all the men of Israel, your little ones, your wives, and your stranger who is in your camp, from the hewer of your wood to the drawer of your water; that you should enter into covenant with the Lord your God, and into his oath, which the Lord your God makes

with you this day; that he may establish you today for a people to himself, and that he may be to you a God, as he has said to you, and as he has sworn to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob. And not with you alone will I make this covenant and this oath; But with he who stands here with us this day before the Lord our God, and also with he who is not here with us this day.”

Psalms 137:5

“If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand wither.”

Isaiah 42:6

“I am God that summoned you through justice, and I have grasped you by the hand, I have created you and appointed you to be a covenant people, a light unto the nations.”

Ruth 1:16

“For where you go, I will go; where you lodge, I will lodge; your people are my people; and your God is my God” We understand that accepting the responsibilities and the benefits of the people are at least as important as accepting God.

II Samuel 7:23; I Chronicles 17:21

“And who is like Thy people (am) Israel, one nation (goy) in the land.”

Esther 3:8

“There is one people scattered and distinct among the peoples, and their beliefs differ from every other people.”

Rabbinic References

Talmud Shevuot 39a

“Kol yisrael arevim zeh bazeh” - “All Israel is responsible for one another.”

Talmud Sanhedrin 37a

“One Jew who saves another Jewish life is as if he saved the entire world.”

Modern References

Yitzchak Rabin upon receiving the Nobel Prize in 1992

I do not stand here alone, today, on this small rostrum in Oslo. I am the emissary of generations of Israelis, of the shepherds of Israel, just as King David was a shepherd, of the herdsmen and dressers of sycamore trees, as the Prophet Amos was; of the rebels against the establishment, like the Prophet Jeremiah, and of men who go down to the sea, like the Prophet Jonah. I am the emissary of the poets and of those who dreamed of an end to war, like the Prophet Isaiah. I am also the emissary of sons of the Jewish people like Albert Einstein and Baruch Spinoza; like Maimonides, Sigmund Freud, and Franz Kafka.

And I am the emissary of the millions who perished in the Holocaust, among whom were surely many Einsteins and Freuds who were lost to us, and to humanity, in the flames of the crematoria. I am here as the

emissary of Jerusalem, at whose gates I fought in days of siege; Jerusalem which has always been, and is today, the eternal capital of the State of Israel and the heart of the Jewish people, who pray toward it three times a day.

And I am also the emissary of the children who drew their visions of peace; and of the immigrants from Saint Petersburg and Addis Ababa. I stand here mainly for the generations to come, so that we may all be deemed worthy of the medallion which you have bestowed on me today. I stand here as the emissary of our neighbors who were our enemies. I stand here as the emissary of the soaring hopes of a people which has endured the worst that history has to offer and nevertheless made its mark - not just on the chronicles of the Jewish people but on all mankind.

The Declaration of the Establishment of the State of Israel May 14, 1948

ERETZ-ISRAEL - the Land of Israel was the birthplace of the Jewish people. Here their spiritual, religious and political identity was shaped. Here they first attained to statehood, created cultural values of national and universal significance and gave to the world the eternal Book of Books. After being forcibly exiled from their land, the people kept faith with it throughout their Dispersion and never ceased to pray and hope for their return to it and for the restoration in it of their political freedom. Impelled by this historic and traditional attachment, Jews strove in every successive generation to re-establish themselves in their ancient homeland...

The catastrophe which recently befell the Jewish people - the massacre of millions of Jews in Europe - was another clear demonstration of the urgency of solving the problem of its homelessness by re-establishing in Eretz-Israel the Jewish State, which would open the gates of the homeland wide to every Jew and confer upon the Jewish people the status of a fully privileged member of the comity of nations...

Accordingly we, members of the People's Council, representatives of the Jewish community of Eretz-Israel and of the Zionist movement, are here assembled on the day of the termination of the British Mandate over Eretz-Israel and, by virtue of our natural and historic right and on the strength of the resolution of the United Nations General Assembly, hereby declare the establishment of a Jewish state in Eretz-Israel, to be known as the State of Israel ... THE STATE OF ISRAEL will be open for Jewish immigration and for the Ingathering of the Exiles; it will foster the development of the country for the benefit of all its inhabitants; it will be based on freedom, justice and peace as envisaged by the prophets of Israel; it will ensure complete equality of social and political rights to all its inhabitants irrespective of religion, race or sex; it will guarantee freedom of religion, conscience, language, education and culture; it will safeguard the Holy Places of all religions; and it will be faithful to the principles of the Charter of the United Nations... WE APPEAL to the Jewish people throughout

the Diaspora to rally round the Jews of Eretz-Israel in the tasks of immigration and upbuilding and to stand by them in the great

struggle for the realization of the age-old dream - the redemption of Israel.

Jewish Peoplehood
Signed by 100 Koldor members
November 8th 2004 / 24 Heshvan 5765

The paradigm of Israel-Diaspora relations must change. We are one people, and Jewish communities around the world should be supported, valued and recognized in their geographic locations. We celebrate the flourishing of Jewish communities the world over as a source of strength in a global age, while keeping dear to our hearts a vision of a spiritual coming together of the Jewish People. We call upon policymakers and leaders to cease denigrating life outside of Israel and to resist any such implication. We call upon Jewish organizations to move to multilateral, round-table structures that reflect the equality of all Jews and all Jewish

communities and the global nature of the Jewish People. Decisions at all levels of Jewish organizations should include consideration of their impact on the various communities involved and on the Jewish—in light of each community's unique needs and circumstances— people as a whole. Organizations should engage with Jewish communities the world over. We should make use of opportunities opened up by technology to learn from one another, act together to improve our people and the wider world, and voice our hopes and concerns for Israel and the Jewish People.

Hatikvah

Still within the innermost heart
The Jewish soul yearns
And toward the east
The eye looks toward Zion.
Our hope has not yet been lost
The 2000 year old hope
To be a free people in our land
the land of Zion and Jerusalem

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Peoplehood: What Students Can Learn and Teach

Wayne L. Firestone

It was recently my pleasure to celebrate the 13th anniversary of Hillel in the former Soviet Union (FSU) – a bar mitzvah – with students, volunteer leaders and Hillel professionals in Moscow. This journey was nothing short of miraculous for me. It seems like only yesterday that I was a Jewish student activist, as young as these students, rallying my campus on behalf of Soviet Jewry. The struggle for Soviet Jewry and their liberation was a high water mark for Jewish Peoplehood, as Jews around the world – from campuses, to Federations, to synagogues, to the halls of Congress and the Knesset – campaigned on behalf of our brethren in the USSR.

Today, Jewish students across the former Soviet Union are free, free to study Hebrew and celebrate their heritage, and free to enjoy the same pleasures and privileges as their counterparts in Israel and the Americas. Many of these young people will travel to Israel with Taglit-birthright israel or to the United States to participate in a Hillel conference, but many more will simply kick back and enjoy the life of a secular college student: like their counterparts around the world, their Jewish identity is defined by *choice* not coercion.

From Hillel's work with students in Israel, the former Soviet Union, Latin America and North America, it is clear that the barriers that once separated Jewish students – language, class, culture – have shrunk. They are one people, but not one Jewish people. The old campaigns that galvanized the global Jewish people for decades – Israel and Soviet Jewry – no longer hold the same power for them. They are united by a global secular, consumerist culture, but not by a sense of global Jewish Peoplehood. Understandably, many campus observers see the trend as a damning obstacle, a signal of civilizational decline. However, the more we learn about the Millennial Generation, the greater the opportunities we

are finding to introduce the value and values of the Jewish people, warts and all.

Our challenge as a community is the same all over the globe: to provide these young people with compelling, meaningful Jewish experiences that not only contribute to their lives but that connect them to their local community. That is why Taglit-birthright israel has proven to be such a remarkable program. Students the world over are attracted to it by its promise of a free journey in an adventurous location. While they are on the trip -- sometime between climbing Massada and exploring Tel Aviv – they connect with one another, with the Jewish community and with Israel. Studies from Brandeis University's Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies have shown that this program enhances students' affinity to Israel and to *Klal Yisrael* weeks, months and years after their trips.

Hillel has been the beneficiary of this program as young people have returned to their homes and explored Jewish life anew as students, activists and young professionals. This is an historic achievement: young people feel closer to the Jewish people not for a negative cause – a battle against a common enemy -- but for the positive reason that they have fallen in love with Israel and are captivated by the warm feeling they get while on a Taglit-birthright israel trip.

Jewish students are at the vanguard of a new era in global Jewish Peoplehood. Not only are they visiting Israel through Taglit, they are traveling the world through semester abroad programs and through alternative breaks where they learn to repair the world with their own hands. They are part of the wave of college students who have doubled the number of U.S. students studying abroad in the last decade. Regrettably, visiting students in Spain, France, England, the Czech Republic, etc., often do not know how to connect with their

local Jewish communities. This poses a challenge and an opportunity for the Jewish world seeking to create a more cohesive global network.

In those countries where we are present, local Hillel professionals go out of their way to include foreign students in their programs. A new agreement with the World Union of Jewish Students also holds the promise of bringing local and visiting students together. Hillel offers substantive programs for only a tiny segment of these young Jewish travelers. Last year, 1,800 Jewish students representing Hillels on over 50 different campuses traveled to 12 different countries on programs organized by Hillel and co-sponsored by the American Jewish World Service and the JDC. In the future, the Jewish community could provide students traveling on secular programs with more meaningful Jewish content on these journeys, and could capitalize on their Peoplehood experiences when they return home. This would represent a return to our Abrahamic and Medieval roots when the value of welcoming travelers for business, study and pilgrimage was central to our communal priorities.

To paraphrase a sage of Boston (Tip O'Neill, not Louis Brandeis) all Peoplehood is local. We must accept, acknowledge and respect our brothers and sisters at home at the same time as we are reaching out to Jews beyond our borders. Here in the United States most campus Jewish communities today look like America at large, but even more so. This generation of Americans is the most ethnically diverse in history and Jewish students reflect diverse

backgrounds, beliefs and orientations. Unlike generations past, they hold multiple identities simultaneously. Unfortunately, too many of them feel unwelcome at Hillel and other Jewish institutions. Following the completion of our Strategic Plan, Hillel has undertaken a program of critical self-reflection and reorganization that will help us to reach out to more and more Jews on campus. If we do not embrace fellow Jews across campus, how can we embrace them across the seas?

Even Israeli students feel a lack of connection to their Jewish identity. They understand their duty to the Jewish State, but not to the Jewish people. Many of the students who are attracted to Hillel in Israel become activists to explore the meaning of their "Jewishness" from a different perspective, whether they are secular or religious, Ashkenazi or Sephardi, new immigrant or native Israeli. Through relationship-based engagements and rich offerings that draw on traditional and modern sources, many discover the Jewishness that connects them to one another, and to their cousins in the Diaspora. Of note, Chabad has had success in their outreach efforts to young Israelis on their journeys to obscure locales in Southeast Asia, teaching that Jewishness does not end at a nation's borders.

We have much to learn from our globe-trotting, Israel-visiting, diversity-celebrating young people. They are erasing the distinctions that divided our community and our world. Our challenge remains to enrich their lives so that they may enrich the Jewish people and the world.

Wayne L. Firestone is President and CEO of Hillel: The Foundation for Jewish Campus Life based in Washington, D.C. He can be reached at wfirestone@hillel.org.

DIMENSIONS OF PEOPLEHOOD

Gil Troy

A Preamble and a Plea

In the spirit of the General Assembly Salon I am moderating, “Young Leaders Explore Peoplehood,” and acknowledging our attention-span-shortened, democratic, blogospheric age, allow me to offer a series of portals, of prompts, of ways into the conversation about Jewish peoplehood. These are a few of my favorite guidelines and texts. They are by no means complete, and they clearly overlap – although there are important distinctions between, say, the cultural dimension of ethnicity, the fraternal dimension of family ties, and the less substantive dimension of the tribal ties. My vision is more fully developed in my book *Why I Am A Zionist: Israel, Jewish Identity and the Challenges of Today*. Here, rather than telling people what I think, I invite people to use these statements and quotations as launching pads for

conversations, arguments, and essays of your own.

I would like, however, to venture, one challenge. I fear that “peoplehood” is becoming a safe, politically-sanitized way of expressing Jewish nationalism without the baggage of Israel or Zionism. The concept of Jewish peoplehood, that Judaism is not just a religion but an historic national community, is intimately tied to the Jews’ one homeland, Israel. As we approach the 60th anniversary of Israel’s miraculous rebirth, we should use the concept of peoplehood as a way into a deeper, more meaningful, less political relationship to the Jewish state, not as a way station toward a safer, generic, non-Israel-oriented, non-God-centered form of Judaism that just makes us feel good as members of a special, historic club as we watch Jon Stewart, don’t celebrate Christmas, bond more quickly with fellow Jews, or eat lox and bagels.

Belonging

I am a Jew because I am a “we,” a link in a chain back to Abraham, consecrated and strengthened by a covenant with God.

Abraham, Genesis, 12:1-2:

א וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל-אַבְרָם, לֵךְ-לְךָ מֵאֶרֶץ וּמְוֹלָדֶיךָ
וּמִבֵּית אָבִיךָ, אֶל-הָאָרֶץ, אֲשֶׁר אֲרָאֶךָ.

1 Now the LORD said unto Abram: 'Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto the land that I will show thee.

ב וְאֶעֱשֶׂךָ, לְגוֹי גָדוֹל, וְאַבְרָכְךָ, וְאַגְדַּלְתָּ שְׁמִי; וְהָיָה,
בְּרָכָה.

2 And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and be thou a blessing.

Morio Feldman, *birthright*, April 9, 2003:

A tear falls: a tear that contains the beauty, the backgrounds, and the brotherhood of Israel. A tear falls: a tear that holds a sunrise over Masada and a sunset over the Old City. A tear falls: a tear that contains the rich beauty of a Kabbalat Shabbat ceremony and the passion of a prayer offered at the Western Wall. And as this tear falls, I realize why I am so moved by the Israelis, a

people formerly unknown to me. I realize that this land, these traditions, and these people are a part of who I am. "They" becomes "we" and I realize that I am one of them.

Fate

I am a Jew because we share a common destiny; all too often as targets but also as active participants in one of humanity's greatest and longest-lasting adventures.

Megillat Ruth, 1:15-17:

And Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, Go, return each of you to her mother's house; God deal kindly with you, as you have dealt with the dead, and with me. 1.16. And Ruth said, Do not entreat me to leave you, or to keep from following you; for wherever you go, I will go; and wherever you dwell, I will dwell; your people shall be my people, and your God my God; 1.17. Where you die, will I die, and there will I be buried; the Lord do so to me, and more also, if even death parts me from you.

History

I am a Jew because I am a part of Jewish history; having been shaped by my Jewish ancestors and traditions, I eagerly look forward to shaping an exciting and compelling Jewish future for my descendants and heirs.

The Haggadah:

בְּכָל-דּוֹר וְדוֹר תִּיב אָדָם לִרְאוֹת אֶת-עַצְמוֹ, כְּאִלּוּ הוּא יָצָא מִמִּצְרַיִם,
B'chol dor v'dor chayav adam lirot et atzmo ki'eelu hu yatzah m'mitzrayim.
In each generation every individual should feel as though
he or she had actually been redeemed from Egypt.

Elie Wiesel:

"We are bound by tradition to believe that together we have stood at Sinai, that together we have crossed the river Jordan, conquered the land of Canaan and built the Temple; that together we have been driven thence by the Babylonians and the Romans; that together we have roamed the dark byroads of exile; that together we have dreamed of recapturing a glory we have never forgotten -- every one of us is the sum of our common history."

Community

I am a Jew because the sum is greater than the individual parts, I am strengthened from being connected to others – and strengthen others in return.

Natan Sharansky, Fear No Evil (1988)

"For the activist Jews of my generation, our movement represented the exact opposite of what our parents had gone through when they were young. But we saw what had happened to their dreams, and we understood that the path to liberation could not be found in denying our own roots while pursuing universal goals. On the contrary: we had to deepen our commitment, because only he who understands his own identity and has already become a free person can work effectively for the human rights of others...."

[During one of the lengthy KGB interrogations....] Finally, Colonel Volodin's patience ran out and he began to yell at me: 'That's enough! What do you think, that your fate is in the hands of those people and not ours? They're nothing more than students and housewives!'

'Students and housewives.' Thank you, Citizen Colonel, for providing me with such an excellent formulation. Today, whenever I appear before audiences in Jerusalem and in New York, in Paris and in London and many other cities where people demonstrated in my behalf, I thank them all for their efforts and I remind them of their strength and their power. And I always remember to tell them what Volodin said, for in the end the army of students and housewives turned out to be mightier than the army of the KGB." Pp. xxii, 170.

Hatikva (1886):

As long as deep in the heart, a Jewish soul yearns. And towards the ends of the east an eye is scouting for Zion. Our hope is as yet not lost. The hope that is 2000 years old. To be a free nation, in our own country. The land of Zion and Jerusalem.

Memory/Identity

I am a Jew because unlike the amnesiac who loses his memory and identity, I remember, I belong, and through both I find my moral bearings.

Rabbi Dr. Jonathan Sacks, The Politics of Hope (1997):

Herzl's character Dr. Friedrich Lowenburg in *Altneuland* who "rediscovers his identity... discovers, as Michael Sandel, Charles Taylor and Michael Walzer have argued, that to have moral commitments, even an identity, we must first belong...."

Ethnicity

I am a Jew because I was born into Jewish culture; I get it, and I like getting it.

Lenny Bruce:

- Dig: I'm Jewish. Count Basie's Jewish. Ray Charles is Jewish. Eddie Cantor's goyish. B'nai Brith is goyish; Hadassah, Jewish.
- If you live in New York or any other big city, you are Jewish. It doesn't matter even if you're Catholic; if you live in New York, you're Jewish. If you live in Butte, Montana, you're going to be goyish even if you're Jewish.
- Kool Aid is goyish. Evaporated milk is goyish even if the Jews invented it. Chocolate is Jewish and fudge is goyish. Fruit salad is Jewish. Lime jello is goyish. Lime soda is very goyish.
- All Drake's Cakes are goyish. Pumpernickel is Jewish and, as you know, white bread is very goyish. Instant potatoes, goyish. Black Cherry soda's very Jewish, macaroons are very Jewish.
- Negroes are all Jews. Italians are all Jews. Irishmen who have rejected their religion are Jews. Mouths are very Jewish. And bosoms. Baton-twirling is very goyish....

Family

I am a Jew because, as Sister Sledge sang, "we are fa-mi-ly," I am rooted in my family's saga, destiny, culture, and values, which are deeply, ineradicably, delightfully Jewish.

Arnie Eisen and Steven M. Cohen, The Jew Within: Self, Family and Community in America (2000):

"The families of our respondents – both families of origin and current families – loomed large in respondents' accounts of their Jewish journeys, activities and identities.... This emphasis on the

family is not at all surprising. Much like other ethnic and religious groups in the United States and elsewhere, Jews harbor a variety of powerful images of their families. Some see them as centers of warmth and nurturing, placing particular emphasis on the maturation and worldly success of the children. At times, so the popular image goes, Jewish families may be *too* warm, too caring, and far too intrusive. However, even in their extreme versions, and whether substantiated or not, images of intense Jewish families stand in contrast to allegedly cold and loveless American WASP counterparts, images that likewise date back half a century and more. Though Jews may differ as to their evaluation of their families, they generally concur as to their salience and centrality.” [pp. 43-44]

Jacob Klatzkin (c. 1914):

“To be a Jew means the acceptance of neither a religious nor an ethical creed. We are neither a denomination nor a school of thought, but members of one family, bearers of a common history.”

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| Tribal |
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I am a Jew because everyone needs to belong to something, and this is the team I was lucky enough to join (by birth or by choice).

Adam Sandler, The Hanukkah Song:

David Lee Roth lights the menorah,
So do James Caan, Kirk Douglas, and the late Dinah Shore-ah
Guess who eats together at the Carnegie Deli,
Bowzer from Sha-na-na, and Arthur Fonzerelli.
Paul Newman’s half Jewish; Goldie Hawn’s half too,
Put them together what a fine lookin Jew!
You don’t need Deck the Halls or Jingle Bell Rock
Cause you can spin the dreidl
with Captain Kirk and Mr. Spock-both Jewish!

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| Spirit |
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I am a Jew because I embrace and celebrate the values and teachings of Jewish civilization.

Mordechai Kaplan:

Judaism must be more than true, good and beautiful. It must, first of all, be alive, and it is alive only to those who live it as a civilization. Judaism is the spirit of a nation, and not the cult of a denomination. When we accept Judaism as a cult only, we consider it our duty to help maintain a synagogue, to attend services occasionally, and to refrain from inter-marrying with non-Jews. But when we accept it as a civilization, we cultivate the knowledge of Israel's past so as to make that past an integral part of our personal memory; we dedicate ourselves to the furtherance of Israel's career, beholding in that career our own personal future; we accept, as far as in us lies, the responsibility for the material and spiritual welfare of all of world Jewry. To be a Jew in that sense is to be imbued with a Jewish consciousness that reaches down into the secret places of the unconscious.

Responsibility

I am a Jew because I take responsibility to count and be counted among my people.

Exodus, Chapter 30:

12 'When thou takest the sum of the children of Israel, according to their number, then shall they give every man a ransom for his soul unto the LORD, when thou numberest them; that there be no plague among them, when thou numberest them.

יב כִּי תִשָּׂא אֶת-רֹאשׁ בְּנֵי-יִשְׂרָאֵל, לְפָקְדֵיהֶם, וְנָתַנוּ אִישׁ כֶּסֶף נַפְשׁוֹ לַיהוָה, בְּפָקֵד אֹתָם; וְלֹא-יִהְיֶה בָהֶם נֶגֶף, בְּפָקֵד אֹתָם.

And a final thought – to put the question of Judaism, Zionism, peoplehood and Israel in the mix...

Gil Troy, *Why I Am a Zionist: Israel, Jewish Identity and the Challenges of Today*:

I am a Zionist because I am a Jew – and without recognizing a national component in Judaism I cannot explain its unique character. Judaism is a world religion bound to one homeland – Israel. We are a people whose Holy Days are defined by the Israeli agricultural calendar, rooted in theological concepts, and linked with historic events.

Gil Troy is Professor of History at McGill University and the author of “Why I Am a Zionist: Israel, Jewish Identity and the Challenges of Today.” Email: gil.troy@mcgill.ca.

Jewish Peoplehood & Identity @ UJC

United Jewish Communities

United Jewish Communities represents and serves 155 Jewish federations and 400 independent Jewish communities across North America. It reflects the values of social justice and human rights that define the Jewish people. The values of caring that transform lives and perform miracles. United Jewish Communities represents and

serves one of the world's largest and most effective networks of social service providers and programs. Men, women and children – both professionals and volunteers – dedicated to safeguarding and enhancing Jewish life. And to meeting the needs of all people, Jews and non-Jews, wherever they live.

Jewish Peoplehood & Identity

Strategic Goal

To enhance Jewish peoplehood and identity to revitalize our global community

JP&I Background

The Jewish Peoplehood and Identity (JP&I) strategy group leads, serves and collaborates with federations and other partners to enrich and strengthen Jewish life and communities in North America, Israel and around the world, based on Torah (learning), tzedek (justice), chesed (caring and compassion), avodah (service) and tikun olam (ethics and repairing the world). JP&I 1) leverages the resources of UJC and the federations in order to increase the system's total capacity; 2) builds strategic collaborative partnerships within and beyond the federation system; and 3) serves as thought leader with key partners to generate "social, intellectual and human capital," to identify new issues and responses, policies and priorities.

JP&I focuses on three primary strategy areas:

- Building commitment and knowledge about Israel and Jewish peoplehood
- Broadening and intensifying outreach and engagement
- Advancing Jewish learning

The main, although not exclusive focus for its efforts are young adults, teens, young families and children. The goal of advancing

access and affordability cuts across all strategy areas. Importantly, a fourth major area for JP&I focus is community/federation capacity building.

Operating Principles

JP&I develops and implements initiatives to respond to emerging and/or ongoing Jewish identity issues; identifies and works on "big idea" initiatives and important efforts of narrower scale; maintains global perspective on issues.

JP&I convenes federations around issues, develops strategy, builds coalitions of willing partners inside and outside the federation world for strategy, policy, planning and best practices and develops action plans on the international/continental scale and local community level.

JP&I enables both local action AND builds continental/local strategy and capacity; collects and teaches best practices; develops standards and protocols; will develop national/local branding strategies; promotes evaluation culture, follow up & linking silos.

JP&I Initiatives

Building Commitment and Knowledge about Israel and Jewish Peoplehood

- Jewish Service Initiative: develop and implement comprehensive strategy to

promote, recruit for and fund volunteer service

- Peoplehood Initiative: Implement global peoplehood/identity education project
- Israel Experience: develop and implement comprehensive promotion, recruitment and funding strategy around Otzma, MASA, Birthright and other Israel programs
- BRI and B3 (Building the birthright israel Brand): manage the federation – bri program
- Roundtable on Jewish Diversity and Identity in Israel: convene federations for strategy, best practices and capacity building
- Israel @ 60: serve as resource and clearinghouse for federation participation
- Otzma: manage the service-based leadership development program for Jewish adults ages 20-26 volunteering in Israel for 10 months in a variety of settings.

Broadening and Intensifying Outreach and Engagement

- Passport to Jewish Life: execute continental effort to connect uninvolved families to meaningful Jewish

experiences and promote access to gateway institutions through financial incentives

- Social Entrepreneurship: support new initiatives of emerging next generation entrepreneurs around North America

Advancing Jewish Learning

- Day School Initiative: develop and implement new models of federation-day school collaboration to promote affordability and access and address marketing, advocacy, professional development and special needs
- Limudim: provide Jewish learning programs for federations

Community/Federation Capacity Building

- Rabbinic Cabinet: engage the rabbinic community in the work of UJC and the federation system and develop, promote and support new models for rabbinic, congregation, community and federation collaboration
- Community Consulting: provide education, strategy support, resources and best practices; special projects and work groups on Synagogue – Federation Relations; Welcoming Communities; Linking Silos; Outreach

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