

# peoplehood: a sense of belonging to a people

כל ישראל  
ערבים זה בזה

## The Peoplehood Papers **3**

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

Fall 2008



## **Is Israel Still the Vision and Venture of the Jewish People?**

The third issue of The Peoplehood Papers, published on the occasion of the United Jewish Community's General Assembly **in Israel** and the Koldor 4<sup>th</sup> Global Conference, is dedicated to exploring the role and place of the Jewish State in the life of the Jewish People.

We asked our contributors to examine Israel through the lens of Jewish Peoplehood by addressing some difficult questions:

- What does it mean to be the State of the Jewish People in 2008?
- Is a new paradigm required to frame the relationship between the People and the State, as well as between the State and the People?
- Is Israel still the State of the Jewish People and what does that relationship entail?
- What should Israel do in order to be the State of the People in the future?
- Should Israel be at the center of Jewish People? If so, what should the Jewish people do to keep Israel at the center of their Peoplehood?

These and other questions relating to different dimensions of the topic are the themes of this publication. Our hope is to frame an agenda, ask questions and inspire conversations. Our greatest reward will therefore be your response to the questions and articles raised in this issue of The Peoplehood Papers

Enjoy and be in touch,

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# Table of Contents

<b>A Post Modern Peoplehood for Israel</b>	
Ari Engelberg.....	4
<b>Israel: The Core Context</b>	
Deborah Housen-Couriel.....	9
<b>Jerusalem as a Metaphor for Jewish Peoplehood</b>	
Elan Ezrachi.....	14
<b>Capitalizing on Jewish Vision and Venture: The Role of Israel in an Age of Individualism</b>	
Flo Low.....	16
<b>Institutionalizing Peoplehood?</b>	
Moty Cristal.....	19
<b>The State, the People and the Promise</b>	
Seth Cohen.....	26
<b>Israel at the “Center”? An Impossible Dream in a 21st Century Network</b>	
Tally Zingher.....	31
<b>Peoplehood with Purpose</b>	
Yossi Abramowitz.....	38
<b>Israel and the Jewish Nation</b>	
Yossi Beilin.....	43

# A Post-Modern Jewish Peoplehood for Israel

By Ari Engelberg

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**M**ordechai Kaplan used the term Jewish Peoplehood already in the fifties, but the concept did not become popular in Jewish organizations before the present millennia. So is Jewish Peoplehood a new concept? Reading through various writings on the subject can lead to conflicting answers. Cohen and Wertheimer, in a frequently quoted article<sup>1</sup>, bemoan the loss of Jewish solidarity of the kind experienced by American Jews who took part in the struggle to free Soviet Jewry in the 1970's. Cohen and Wertheimer seek to reaffirm Peoplehood values that existed in the past and are now threatened by the growing spiritual individualism of many committed American Jews combined with the assimilation of the non-committed.

Other activists and writers attribute specific meanings to Peoplehood that go further than simply emphasizing the ethnic/national aspect of Judaism. These writers consider Peoplehood to be a novel idea. The contents of this idea may seem at times a bit unclear; this lack of clarity has led some to claim that Peoplehood is nothing more than a vacuous catch word<sup>2</sup>. I believe that these advocates of Peoplehood make some valid points, but these points are, at times, subtle.

Bouganim writes of Kaplan that once the State of Israel was founded, he stopped using the term "nationhood" as it had become too closely identified with Statehood, and began using Peoplehood instead<sup>3</sup>. True to their roots, Peoplehood supporters belonging to the second group are also offering a vision that differs from "classical Zionism" but does not quite contradict it. They call for a discourse between Israel and Diaspora communities that will be held on equal footing, with Israel no longer seen as the center of world Jewry. This innovative stand is not necessarily post-Zionist.

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<sup>1</sup> Cohen, Steven, M. and Jack Wertheimer. 2006. "Whatever Happened to the Jewish People?" *Commentary*, June pg. 33-37.

<sup>2</sup> Michaelson, Jay. 2008. "Peoplehood: There's No There There" *Forward* April 16<sup>th</sup>.

<sup>3</sup> Bouganim, Ami. "Jewish Sectarianism and Jewish Peoplehood" in *Building Jewish Peoplehood: Challenges and Possibilities*. Editors: Ezra Kopelowitz and Menachem Revivi. 87-108

In the case of both nationalism and religion, Peoplehood supporters seem to be making a subtle statement. Their goal is to "capture the idea of belonging to the Jewish people in a manner that transcends religion."<sup>4</sup> Contrary to statements made by various thinkers, the fact that Judaism is both a nationality and a religion is unique only in modern day Western settings; in primitive times each tribe had its own god. It is true that Islam, Christianity and Buddhism spread precisely because they offered a universal message, but even they were not successful in maintaining a universal form and eluding identification of belief systems and saints with specific localities. Peoplehood advocates tend to regard religion primarily as a vehicle for maintaining group solidarity. Their attitude towards religion may be regarded as a post-modern embrace of pre-modern sensibilities.

Writers belonging to the first group, those who wish to bring back the Jewish solidarity of yesteryear, tend to equate Peoplehood with nationalism and consider post-modernity to be a threat to both. In fact, the Jewish Peoplehood movement may be described as a postmodern phenomenon<sup>5</sup>. First, a concise description of post-modernity as a social phenomenon is necessary. Post-modernity signifies a lack of belief in great ideologies such as fascism, communism, and scientism that were dominant in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. There is a tendency to revert to tribal identification and belonging, seeking meaning in values that grow out of family and group identification. States no longer try to implement melting pot policies for immigrants, but rather adopt a multi-cultural approach. Individuals belonging to ethnic or cultural Diasporas maintain contact with each other by making use of the opportunities that technological advancements in the fields of communication and transportation have made possible.

Jewish Peoplehood fits neatly into these trends. Much of what is going on in the arena of Jewish Peoplehood is happening in cyber space; 'communication' and 'networking' are key words in many Peoplehood projects. Advocates of Jewish Peoplehood have referred to the ability to live in more than one place (thanks to globalization) as the epitome of Jewish

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<sup>4</sup> Kopelowitz, Ezra and Ari Engelberg. 2007. *A Framework for Strategic Thinking about Jewish Peoplehood*. A paper commissioned by the Nadav Fund.

<sup>5</sup> Drori-Binder and Tzfonon also describe Peoplehood as postmodern, see: Drori-Binder, Ruth & Guy Tzfonon. 2006 [Hebrew]. "Jewish Peoplehood as a Network of Communities." *Alumot* pp. 21-36.

Peoplehood<sup>6</sup>. And as mentioned above, supporters of Peoplehood tend to view religion primarily as a source of unity and not of theological debate and divisiveness.

### **When Peoplehood Attempts to Make Aliya**

Jewish Peoplehood, as a concept, is an invention of American Jewry. When attempts are made to 'import' Peoplehood to Israel it should be noted that the concept is entering a different context. To begin with, in Israel, even those who choose a more individualistic attitude towards religion still tend to identify with the Jewish collective. In the Israeli reality, one must take a stand for or against Jewish identification, and when one thinks in Jewish terms one is bound to identify with the Jewish collective. This leads me to the second difference: in Israel, Jewish identity is more likely to impact state politics. The Boyarin brothers go so far as to claim that Jewish identity discourse in the context of a sovereign Jewish state is oppressive<sup>7</sup>. Contrary to the Boyarins' stand, philosopher Charles Taylor views activity for preserving the heritage of national majority groups as legitimate so long as minority rights are safeguarded<sup>8</sup>. Either way, one should be aware of the different implications that 'Jewish identity' has in a Jewish state.

So how is the idea of Peoplehood being received in Israel? On an organizational level it seems to be gaining currency. Ezra Kopelowitz identified a policy shift in The Jewish Agency for Israel from the "Classical Zionist" towards a "Peoplehood Paradigm"<sup>9</sup>. Prime Minister Olmert endorsed a Peoplehood policy regarding Israel-Diaspora relations in a public address this summer.

What about the grass roots level? Research has shown that Israeli Jews neither know very much nor care about world Jewry<sup>10</sup>. In the past, as a result of the classical Zionist stand,

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<sup>6</sup> Wilf, Einat. 2005. "Mitzvot of Peoplehood," Ynet News. June 2nd. <http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-3041999,00.html>

<sup>7</sup> בוֹיָאָרִין, דְּנִיָּאל וְבוֹיָאָרִין, יוֹנָתָן. 1994. אֵין מוֹלַדֶּת לְיִשְׂרָאֵל: עַל הַמָּקוֹם שֶׁל הַיְהוּדִים. תּוֹאֵרִיה וּבִיקוּרֶת 5, 79-103.

<sup>8</sup> Taylor, Charles. 1994. *Multiculturalism: examining the politics of recognition*. edited and introduced by Amy Gutmann. Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press

<sup>9</sup> Kopelowitz, Ezra. 2006b. *Organizing the Israeli-Diaspora Relationship, While Moving from Classic Zionism to Something Else*. Department of Education, Jewish Agency for Israel  
[http://www.israeldiaspora.org/images/public/meeting\\_summary/Summary2005.pdf](http://www.israeldiaspora.org/images/public/meeting_summary/Summary2005.pdf)

<sup>10</sup> אורון, יאיר. 1993. *זהות יהודית ישראלית*. תל אביב: ספרית פועלים והמכללה לחינוך - סמינר הקיבוצים.

Israelis exhibited a paternalistic attitude towards world Jewry; the message being that Jewish life in the exile is a thing of the past and now all Jews should live in Israel. Today, most Israelis simply do not see themselves as having much in common with world Jewry; they identify first and foremost as Israelis.

The Israelis who demonstrate an interest in Peoplehood are for the most part secular Ashkenazi Jews who are engaged in other "Jewish identity" activities such as studying Jewish texts and participating in encounters with Orthodox Jews. The *Oranim* College has published the only publication in Hebrew dedicated to this subject<sup>11</sup>. This college is part of a movement sometimes referred to as 'The New *Batei Midrash*'. These *Batei Midrash* are schools for adult education that cater primarily to secular Israelis who are seeking to enrich their knowledge of Jewish heritage. Researchers of this movement have identified two major motivations that students have for participating in activities: A. Like other members of the upper-middle class they too are seeking meaning. For this reason much room is given to "connecting" to the text on a personal level. B. The need to justify the Zionist claim that Jews have a right to the Land of Israel. The ancient texts that are studied in the *Batei Midrash* delineate the story of the Jewish people and their connection to the land, and thus instill within participants the belief that they have a right to the land<sup>12</sup>.

Pluralistic organizations that are involved in the field of informal Jewish-Zionist education (such as JAFI, *Melitz*, *Gesher*) often use studying techniques developed in the *Batei Midrash* in their own programs. Other identity practices that they commonly employ include encounters with Orthodox Jews and establishing contacts between Israeli and Diaspora Jews. These three informal education techniques have much in common. Participants in these activities are meant to discover diverse possibilities of maintaining Jewish worship and study, and at the same time strengthen Jewish solidarity as well as Zionist stands<sup>13</sup>. This is no less true with regard to the third activity mentioned above – meetings between Israelis and Diaspora Jews. It has been shown that when secular Israelis

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Shimoni, S. and Shaltiel, S. 2006. *The place of American Judaism in High School Education in Israel*. American Jewish Committee. New York

<sup>11</sup> אלוטות הוצאת שדמות, מכללת אורנים.

<sup>12</sup> הכהן-שגיב, טליה. 2003. *חילונים לומדים יהדות: זירת חיפוש ומאבק*. חיבור לשם קבלת תואר מוסמך, מוגש למחלקה לחינוך באוניברסיטה העברית: ירושלים.

<sup>13</sup> אנגלברג, ארי. 2004. *פרקטיקות זהות יהודיות ולאומיות ישראלית*, עבודת גמר לקראת תואר מוסמך בחוג לסוציולוגיה ואנתרופולוגיה באוניברסיטה העברית.

meet Diaspora Jews it strengthens and gives form to their Jewish identity that had been taken for granted by many of them, and this in turn fortifies Zionist stands<sup>14</sup>.

For this reason, despite the differences between Jewish Peoplehood and "classical Zionist" approaches described above, the two are often viewed by post-Zionist critics as standing on the same side of the ideological divide – the Zionist side. This can be better understood by referring to Israeli sociologist Uri Ram's claim that old school secular socialist Zionism is dead and Israelis now belong to one of two categories: Post-Zionist or Neo-Zionist. The first group is oblivious to any form of collective identity, Judaism included, and the second has amalgamated Zionism and Judaism<sup>15</sup>. According to this dichotomous view of Israeli society, an ideology with Judaism at its center will of necessity bolster Zionist stands.

I do not find Ram's description of Israeli society to be accurate. A growing number of Israelis do not fit neatly into religious or secular categories. But it is important to realize that many Israelis on both sides of the divide still think in these terms. Peoplehood speaks precisely to Israeli Jews who do not fit neatly into the secular-religious dichotomy. These individuals are seeking sources of inspiration and enrichment and are not afraid to trespass on societal boundaries. A post-modern form of Jewish solidarity can play a positive role, offering a Jewish identity that is rich and pluralist, Zionist and universal. Peoplehood has the potential to play a role in Israeli Jewish life, but when entering the Israeli context, of necessity it will be transformed.

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<sup>14</sup> Bram, Chen and Ari Engelberg. 2003 [Hebrew]. Meeting Diaspora Jews and the Impact on Secular/Religious Discourse in Israel: An Evaluation of the Nitzanim Program. Department of Jewish Zionist Education, The Jewish Agency for Israel, Jerusalem.

Bram, Chen, and Eran Neria. 2003 [Hebrew]. "Veni, Vedi, Ii : Israeli "Shlichim" Identity Encounters in U.S Jewish Summer camps [Hebrew]." Department of Jewish Zionist Education, The Jewish Agency for Israel, Jerusalem. Paper can be downloaded at: <http://www.jafi.org.il/education/moriya/newpdf/BramNaria.pdf>

<sup>15</sup> רם, אורי 1998. בזכות השכחה. תיאוריה וביקורת, 12-13, 349-358.



## Israel: The Core Context

By Deborah Housen-Couriel

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The deep meaning of the controversial, inspiring and dynamic existence of the State of Israel today is not a complicated one; yet, like many simple truths, it possesses a mythic power.

An ancient people has returned, with almost unimaginable conviction and force of will, to the tribal land to which it has been bound in so many different ways for five millennia. A half or more of this people remains outside of its borders. And now, at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, in a world of unprecedented challenges to humanity, this entire tribe is obligated by its past to engage with the issues and problems related to the next phase of its way of being in the world. The most compelling setting for this task is the State of Israel, the core context of Jewish Peoplehood.

The primal bond between the Jewish tribe and its land, the *brit* described at such length and with such precise detail by Moses in *Devarim*, remains a crucial, living and breathing covenant. The deal is this: you, Jewish people, will institute and uphold revolutionary standards of justice, law and morality through the civilization that you build in the land of Israel, which you are about to enter. I, Adon HaOlam (or, in an alternative reading, the force or flow of history), will take responsibility for your continued survival.

Even when you falter on the way to building this revolutionary civilization, you will have a second chance, and a third one, and more after that.<sup>16</sup> You may take the work of civilization-building with you when you are forced to depart this land, but it is the unique venue in which the essence of this work can ultimately be fulfilled.

This *brit* holds today, and has held through the centuries, not necessarily as a matter of faith – although this is obviously an option - but as what we might call, in 21<sup>st</sup> century terms, a unique social contract - among ourselves, with the land, and with other peoples of

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<sup>16</sup> The dynamic of exile and redemption as part of the covenant is described in *Devarim*, Chapter 30 (*Parashat Nitzavim*). See also *Devarim*, 11:8-22, 31-32, and 12:1 ("These are the statutes and the ordinances, which ye shall observe to do in the land which the LORD, the God of thy fathers, hath given thee to possess it, all the days that ye live upon the earth.).

the world. And the best prism that I can suggest for understanding this social contract is that of a renewed, re-energized, and pro-active Jewish tribalism.

This tribal paradigm places Israel and covenant at its center. It petals out, from this center, into the diverse ways in which any one of us who self-identifies as a Jew chooses to connect with Jewish meaning: the study of Jewish history, religious belief, language (Hebrew, Ladino, Yiddish, Esperanto), Israeli patriotism, remembrance of the *Shoah*, Zionism, family and kinship ties, cuisine, geopolitics, exploring Israel's hiking trails, *tikkun olam*, building bridges to other faiths, or creating a Jewish cinematography.

Yet approaching Jewish Peoplehood in this way demands of us the wise use of unprecedented practical tools for framing the relationship among those living in Israel and those remaining abroad, perhaps at the outer edges of the tribal petals; and within the State of Israel itself.

Such tools seem almost trivial in our globally interconnected world. But we as a people have yet to take upon ourselves the responsibility of utilizing them with anything approaching the necessary focus and resources:

- Designing and implementing a plan for identifying and **networking all existing Jewish communities**, including their organizational and personal connections with each other and to Israel;
- Identifying **key strategic issues common to Israel and world Jewish communities**, analysis of these issues, creation of a public square for their debate, and a division of labor for moving forward with them;
- Leveraging **the positive minority experience and rich experience of social activism** of Jewish communities outside of Israel, particularly in North America, to energize and reform Israel's social, welfare and fiscal policies;
- Developing and effectively distributing **a comprehensive and standardized educational program** for the next two generations of Jewish youth around the world, to include Hebrew literacy and deep learning about the diversity of today's practice of Judaism;
- Developing meaningful **adult learning programs**, both virtual and experiential, which emphasize the centrality of Israel to Jewish Peoplehood and aimed at forging an understanding of shared values and experiences.
- Implementing an **"adult birthright"** initiative, to bring to Israel those who have not come to see it with their own eyes, for even week-long visits.

Leveraging such initiatives is certainly within the capacity of the Jewish people as it defines itself today. So why, in the post-modern, electronic, polished and smooth 21<sup>st</sup> century, the insistence on viewing the project of renewed Jewish Peoplehood as a tribal renaissance, centered irrevocably on the State of Israel?

Let me try to answer with two personal stories about Jews and tribes:

Story One: A Jerusalem lawyer, originally from Seattle, is engaged to draft an apartment contract for our first, expanded family home after the birth of our daughter. Instead of drafting the contract, eventually drawn up elsewhere, he weaves an intriguing tale of his pre-*aliyah* career as a Native American legal affairs expert in the Northwest US. An overwhelming percentage of the US Federal Indian Affairs Bar Association, this *oleh hadash* tells me, is Jewish. This is also true for the Bureau of Indian Affairs, the US federal government arm that deals with Native American land rights, tribal autonomy, culture, language, education and history.

More of the story comes out with a bit of research: one of the earliest US jurists in the realm of Native American law, who in 1941 pioneered the first *Handbook on Federal Indian Law* and later forged its jurisprudence, was Felix Solomon Cohen, the son of an Orthodox, Lower East Side family.<sup>17</sup> Here is Cohen's famous passage on minority rights, written in 1953:

[T]he Indian plays much the same role in our American society that the Jews played in Germany. Like the miner's canary, the Indian marks the shifts from fresh air to poison gas in our political atmosphere; and our treatment of Indians, even more than our treatment of other minorities, reflects the rise and fall in our democratic faith.<sup>18</sup>

My Jerusalem lawyer went on with his explanation of how a tribal chief with whom he worked in the 1960's made sense of this bizarre yet visceral connection between Jews and Native Americans. "You Jews are the only other Americans who understand the connection between tribe and land," said the chief to my attorney in a bar one night.

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<sup>17</sup> For more on Cohen's life and work as a legal pioneer of Native American rights, see Dalia Tsuk Mitchell, *Architect of Justice: Felix Cohen and the Founding of American Legal Pluralism*, Cornell Univ. Press, 2007; and S.P. McSloy, "A Bird's Eye View of American Indian Law and Its Future", 37 *New England Law Review* 2003, pp. 733-740.

<sup>18</sup> F.S. Cohen, "The Erosion of Indian Rights 1950-53: A Case Study in Bureaucracy", 62 *Yale Law Journal* 1953, p. 348, at 390.

Story Two: My college thesis adviser at Wellesley, a prominent cultural anthropologist, refrained for a full decade after graduation from telling me that she was born a Jew in inter-war Germany, extracted from the hell of Nazism, like so many others, only by chance. On the other hand, she did spend hour after hour telling me about the wonders of raising her two American-born sons among the Iroquois at the Six Nations Reservation where she later was awarded honorary tribal membership, the site of her post-graduate work under some of America's outstanding linguistic and cultural anthropologists.

Who were these scholars of the new science of the social, linguistic and cultural development of humans in groups – "Peoplehood science"?<sup>19</sup> Unbelievably, transplanted European Jew after transplanted European Jew: Franz Boaz, Meyer Fortes, Robert Lowie, and Ruth Behar; also, the non-transplanted Emile Durkheim, Charles Gabriel Seligman, and Claude Levi-Strauss.<sup>20</sup> The Orthodox German Jew Edward Sapir, the founder of linguistic anthropology in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, is a personal favorite example of a Jew seeking out the truth of Peoplehood among other peoples and tribes. Born in 1884 in Germany, a New Yorker by age six, Sapir was a pioneer in the linguistic study of Yiddish. Yet his professional bibliography seamlessly segues from *mamaloschen* to the Northern Pacific languages of the Upper Chinook, the Ute, the Nootka and the Navaho.<sup>21</sup>

So many pioneers of this science of tribes are Jews; yet their collective professional introspection into Jewish Peoplehood is a chapter that has yet to be penned.<sup>22</sup> Gelya Frank of USC has written:

There has always been a lively, if hushed, in-house discourse about American anthropology's Jewish origins and their meaning. The preponderance of Jewish intellectuals in the early years of Boasian anthropology and the Jewish identities of anthropologists in subsequent generations have been downplayed in standard histories of the discipline.... [Yet] the development of ...anthropology appears part of Jewish history.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> "Anthropology: the scientific study of the origin, the behavior, and the physical, social, and cultural development of humans," The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language, 4<sup>th</sup> ed., Houghton-Mifflin, 2004.

<sup>20</sup> For an introduction to the seminal role of Jews in the development of modern anthropology, see J. Feldman, "The Jewish Roots and Routes of Anthropology", 77 Anthropological Quarterly 2004, pp.107-125; G. Frank, "Jews, Multiculturalism, and Boasian Anthropology." 99 American Anthropologist 1997, pp. 731-745; and W. Zenner, ed., "The Issue of Jewishness in Ethnographic Fieldwork," special issue of Anthropology and Humanism Quarterly, 14(1), 1989.

<sup>21</sup> E. Sapir, Language, Culture and Personality; W. Cowan, M. Foster, K. Koerner, New perspectives in language, culture, and personality: Proceedings of the Edward Sapir Centenary Conference (Ottawa, 1-3 October 1984), John Benjamins, 1986; R. Darnell, Edward Sapir: Linguist, Anthropologist, Humanist, University of California Press, 1989.

<sup>22</sup> "Large numbers of American anthropologists come from Jewish families, yet very few have done any research or writing on Jews.", Feldman, supra note 5, at 107.

<sup>23</sup> Frank, supra note 5, at 731.

These two stories hint at the inexorable pull that some Jews feel towards other tribal experiences. Our own tribe is not unusual in some senses: we have a myth, a language, a land, a specific way of being in the world. It is most unusual in two ways: the fact of its survival against all odds and its continual insistence on returning to the land of Israel.

The times we live in are perhaps characterized most by the tension between our identities as individuals and as part of social and political collectives. The opportunity provided to Jews to resolve this tension is a rare gift of history. In a recent essay in Foreign Affairs entitled "Us and Them: The Enduring Power of Ethnic Nationalism", Professor Jerry Muller argues that ethnic nationalism – the political scientist's 'Peoplehood' – has an enduring power in the geopolitics of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and that "... it corresponds to some enduring propensities of the human spirit that are heightened by the process of modern state creation."<sup>24</sup>

As Jews who finally have managed to wrest a nation-state of our own out of modern history, we stand squarely at the center of this phenomenon. There are important roles for those who find meaning in their Jewish identity at the edge of the tribal circle. And yet, to live as a Jew in the State of Israel at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century presents both a mythic challenge and opportunity, and an historic one. It is one that should be embraced by any Jew who can possibly bring himself or herself to this place.

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<sup>24</sup> J. Muller, "Us and Them: The Enduring Power of Ethnic Nationalism", Foreign Policy, March/April 2008, pp. 18-35, at 35.

## Jerusalem as a Metaphor for Jewish Peoplehood

By Elan Ezrachi

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In 1952 Izhak Ben-Zvi was elected as Israel's second president. Israel was a four-year-old country struggling to get its systems running amidst a huge wave of immigration of refugees from Europe and the Islamic world. At the time, the Presidency was in the process of formation. Ben-Zvi and his wife Rachel Yanait, decided to put a very strong emphasis on what they called: **The unity of the tribes of Israel**. They perceived the return of Jews from all corners of the world to Israel as a challenge for the new State. The so-called "tribes" that made up the new Israeli society spoke different languages, reflected different cultural backgrounds and performed different Jewish rituals. The Ben-Zvis believed that a key to unity was to get to know each one of these groups and from this diversity unity would arise. To advance this cause they initiated a monthly event in the President's House. Every Rosh Chodesh, they hosted a gathering in the presidential reception hall in Jerusalem, each one dedicated to a different "tribe." The goal of each gathering was to learn about the core story of the particular group (tribe), in order to determine what needed to be preserved and how the group could integrate into the emerging Israeli society. All in all, there were 18 events that took place during the 1950's. In each event, representatives of the group, from all walks of life, would tell the history of the tribe, describe its spiritual assets and outline its prospective contribution to Israeli society. When the Ben-Zvis announced this initiative they referred to an ancient custom of pilgrimage to Jerusalem during every first of the month.

This wonderful, if somewhat naïve, story reflects the optimistic vision that prevailed in Israel in the early years. The Ben-Zvis believed that the Presidency and the symbolism of Jerusalem as the new capital would be the glue that holds together the various groups. In the years that followed, we learned that Israel's ethnic diversity would also a source of social and economic gaps, political and religious tensions, and at times, outright animosity and bias. Sixty years later, Israel has found ways to balance these diversities and social analysts do not consider the ethnic divides as obstacles to the creation of a cohesive Israeli culture and society. Israeli society today knows how to manage diversity and as a matter

of fact it has turned into a multicultural society with a fair amount of tolerance and acceptance of otherness.

This brings us back to Jerusalem as the symbol of Jewish unity. As Israel established its national character, as expected, Jerusalem was declared the new-old capital. Jerusalem holds a deep meaning which transcends the formal definition of an official state capital. Jerusalem is the location of the ancient Jewish State, as well as the center of our religious consciousness. The return of a Jewish polity to Jerusalem as the new capital stands firmly on these ancient layers.

Jerusalem holds a special meaning to Jews around the world, far beyond Israeli citizenry. In some ways we can say that Jerusalem is the capital city of the entire Jewish people. What does this status mean? Diaspora Jews are not citizens of Israel, yet they relate to Jerusalem and regard this city as an essential part of their consciousness. There are several expressions that exemplify this sentiment. First, Jews who visit Israel spend a significant amount of time in Jerusalem connecting to its historical and religious sites. Second, Jerusalem is the location of many international Jewish institutions and plays host to many international Jewish events, including 2008 General Assembly.

This is not enough. As we are working towards conceptualizing the term Jewish Peoplehood, we need to determine the role of Jerusalem as a metaphor for Jewish unity and diversity. How can Jerusalem serve as a meeting place for Jews from around the world? How can Jerusalem facilitate the creation of a world-wide Jewish consciousness? What institutions need to be created to ensure that Jewish Peoplehood is managed with Jerusalem being a hub of this global project?

Jerusalem, with its symbolism, history and current reality can become the center of Jewish Peoplehood. Just like Izhak Ben-Zvi who gathered the “tribes” in the 1950’s to create the message of Israeli Jewish unity, so are we today required to bring together Jewish communities from the entire world to appreciate their uniqueness through the story of Jerusalem.

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## Capitalizing on Jewish Vision and Venture: The Role of Israel in an Age of Individualism

By Flo Low

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This year, following the State of Israel's 60<sup>th</sup> birthday, The Peoplehood Papers has chosen to address the question, "Is Israel still the vision and venture of the Jewish people?" For those few of us who still hold the principles of classical Zionism dear, it is an unfortunate question, because if it must be asked, the answer is depressingly clear.

But upon second thought, perhaps it needn't be – perhaps the question is more rightly viewed as an imperative, and an opportunity: an opportunity for crucial, vital self-examination. Because 60 years down the line, it is past time that Israel do a serious "cheshbon nefesh" [self-examination] and re-examine its priorities, its success and failures, its mission and its role.

Five years ago, I experienced my biggest disappointment as a Jewish educator at the conclusion of my first summer as a group leader for American teens on a peer mission to Israel. After six weeks of hikes and visits to historic sites throughout the Holy Land, debating Zionist ideas and discussing the importance of Israel to the Jewish people, my 40 campers proudly presented their Israeli staff members with two plane tickets to America, saying, "Thank you for showing us your homeland. Now, we want to show you ours."

Shortly after that pivotal summer, I encountered Jerold S. Auerbach's "Are We One?" in which the author argued that, "adrift on a sea of relativism and revisionism, their Jewish compass badly battered by the enticements of modernity, Jews follow the siren song of assimilation and normalization wherever the gusts of changing fashion may take them."

Convinced, based on my summer experience, that Auerbach's remarks accurately assessed the tendencies of contemporary American youth, I adopted the determinist stance that American Jewry and Israel Jewry were at irreconcilable odds and that, other than those lucky few of us who felt an inexplicable inner imperative to build our lives here, there was no hope of convincing the masses of Diaspora Jews of the vital necessity of this place, not to mention their inherent and inalienable connection to it.



Yet the continual success of programs such as Birthright-Taglit or similar peer trips to Israel begs otherwise. The fact is, though difficult if not impossible to quantify, those who spend time in Israel express feeling changed and continually report feeling closer to their Jewish roots or, put simply, feel “more Jewish.” And the impact of long-term programs such as those offered by “MASA” only deepens that connection and those feelings of identification and belonging. That is to say, despite the recent and frequent dismal reports that young people today identify less and less with Israel, those who do come and spend time in the country are affected by their stay.

**What this suggests to me today is that the problem may not be the product, but the packaging.**

For in an age of individualism, when identity is self-determined and Jewish identity is a matter of choice, marketing Israel as a “haven for the exiles” or a “great Jewish experiment” is no longer relevant, nor engaging to a generation where the world is – with a keyboard, quite literally – at their fingertips. On the other hand, given that Israel’s unique appeal is the mysterious, omnipresent holiness (for lack of a better term), and its unique juxtaposition of antiquity coupled with modernism and high-tech, diluted campaigns such as the recent “Israel: Who knew?” or the cheap placement of fashion models on Tel Aviv skyscrapers are a direct disservice to all that Israel stands for and has to offer, and everything that gives the State its distinct and unparalleled appeal.

Yes, it is time for a paradigm shift – because Israel is no longer simply a gathering place for Jewish exiles; nor will it ever be the permanent destination for all of world Jewry. But neither is it a state like all other modern political states – it represents too much for too many.

Auerbach writes, “To be a modern Jew is to be pulled between tradition and modernity, between religious and secular imperatives, between insularity and universality. Jews must delicately, and endlessly, renegotiate their own identity to accommodate to the majority cultures that surround them.”

And Israel is the ideal stomping ground, the one and only factory, a “test tube” in which one can be fully immersed in one’s Jewish identity while subsumed in wholly secular,

modern, “normative” national culture that is bustling and thriving, and one which is young enough that there is still room for an individual to negotiate its boundaries and play a central role in what is being formed.

At the same time, the State is no longer in its infancy, and its leaders need to accept responsibility for its journey into maturity and set a course all the requirements this necessitates, however painful those realizations may prove to be. It is time to give up on the simplistic dichotomy of *aliyah* and philanthropy, of a young state waiting for the influx of world Jewry and dependent upon external support. These concessions are necessary precursors for a new and flourishing relationship between the State of Israel and the Jewish People today, and for Israel to begin to fulfill a greater role for the Jewish people and in the international world community.

In an age of individualism and of choice, the State of Israel can continue to play a powerful role because it is a place that provides answers to questions of identity, connecting generations of individual Jews (and non-Jews) to their history and to their roots. In an age of entrepreneurship and innovation, it is a place of opportunity, of energy, of community and of inspiration.

Israel, today, is not the vision and the venture of *\*the\** Jewish people – but if we broaden our collective vision, it can fulfill a greater role, and foster the vision and venture of *\*Jewish people\** -- each and every one fortunate enough to live here or to visit.

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# Institutionalizing Peoplehood?

By Moty Cristal, an Israeli

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*Editor's Note: In following the logic of intertwined networks and ideas, Cristal's piece refers to and interacts with ideas presented in other articles in this volume*

**T**his article should have been written in Hebrew, the language of the Jewish People. However, despite the fact that Israel is rapidly becoming the largest Jewish community in the world, most of the conversations on Jewish matters are conducted in English.

But first things first.

Jewish Peoplehood is quickly becoming the organizing principle of Jewish life. Scholars and practitioners are debating its scope, content, origins, and relevance. Some compare it to Kaplan's concept of Jewish civilization and others see Jewish Peoplehood as a timely move from Herzl to Ahad Ha'am. The articles in this volume of Peoplehood Papers, their footnotes and references, as well as the "The Peoplehood Papers" series by itself, reflect more than anything the richness and the depth of this conversation.

Struggling with the attempt to define, rather than just describe, Jewish Peoplehood, scholars and practitioners are drawing the lines of this conversation. This is a dialogue which is not merely intellectual, but rather stems from a need – a need voiced by younger people throughout the Jewish world to create a different,<sup>25</sup> more appropriate Jewish paradigm which will meet the external challenges that our global society is facing,<sup>26</sup> reflect the existing trends<sup>27</sup> within North American Jewry as the second largest Jewish

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<sup>25</sup> As the dissatisfaction with the existing "roles" in the global Jewish theatre described by Ted Sokolsky, President and CEO, UJA Federation of Greater Toronto in his publication: "Jewish Peoplehood. Towards a New Path of Israel Diaspora Relations": "However, in the creation of those achievements [the creation of the State of Israel] certain stereotypes were constructed, that now impede our ability to grow as a people together.. Diaspora Jewry too often saw itself as the "great provider" of Israeli society offering financial and moral support to a struggling nation...and it was a vast frontier open for mining: mining for Olim or financial support"

<sup>26</sup> For a comprehensive analysis of challenges facing the Jewish people see "Mega-Trends in the Next Five Years which will Impact on World Jewry and Israel", by Ambassador Stuart E. Eisenstaedt, submitted by the Jewish Policy Planning Institute to the 2008 "Facing Tomorrow" conference. ([www.jpppi.org.il](http://www.jpppi.org.il)).

<sup>27</sup> See on one hand the discouraging data analysis presented in Prof. Steven Cohen's research such as "A Tale of Two Jewries: The Inconvenient Truth for American Jews" and the critique of Prof. Saxe who argues that: ..."Findings suggest

community in the world, as well as address the hunger that exists within the elites in Israel for Jewish content in their lives.<sup>28</sup> Meeting all these challenges requires a more updated defined paradigm - something which goes beyond, and not replaces, classic Zionism.

Whether it is Yossi Abramowitz's "on-going distinctive catalyst" definition, or Brook Goldstein's suggested definition for Neo-Zionism as "going away from the Israel-centric paradigm towards a progressive zionOUT where a home state spreads its influence by empowering its people abroad," or any other definition suggested, it is evident that we are facing a dramatic paradigm shift in Jewish life, which is gaining increasing support within Jewish communities worldwide<sup>29</sup>. This shift, from the classic Zionist, Israeli-centered paradigm towards a more People-centric paradigm, a Peoplehood paradigm, calls to put the Jewish People in the center and to ensure that the Jewish People, the Jewish tribe, wherever its daughters and sons reside, maintains strong links to and with its nation-state, the State of Israel.

This paradigm shift and the necessity to articulate it loud and clear was presented by Prime Minister Olmert, in his address to the JAFI assembly in June 2008:

"The timing of this session affords me the opportunity to share with you thoughts and plans which I have been contemplating for a while - to change the paradigm of relations between the State of Israel and the Diaspora... With new realities, comes the need for a new paradigm..."

"The old paradigm of the Diaspora as benefactor and Israel as beneficiary can no longer continue... For the past sixty years, Israel has been the project of the Jewish People. For the next sixty years, the Jewish People will need to be the joint project of Israel and Jewish communities around the world"

Now that the "Chief Executive" of the Jewish State has acknowledged the need for a paradigm shift, and indicated its general direction, scholars and practitioners must lay out the content and the operational actions associated with this shift.<sup>30</sup>

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that deterministic views of the impact of birthrates and intermarriage may need to be adjusted". In the working Paper series: Understanding Contemporary American Jewry" of the Steinhardt Social Research Institute, January 2007.

<sup>28</sup> As described here by Ari Engelberg and Yossi Beilin.

<sup>29</sup> It is not a coincidence that this article, as well as most others in this volume, does not use the term "Diaspora". In the Jewish context, this term carries a certain value judgment, which contradicts the new Peoplehood paradigm.

<sup>30</sup> Many are still arguing that "Peoplehood, rather than becoming a powerful, overarching umbrella concept for Jewish life, could become the "poor stepchild for those who are not religiously or nationally engaged", Alan Hoffmann at [http://www.pathstopeoplehood.org/article\\_one.aspx](http://www.pathstopeoplehood.org/article_one.aspx).

Executing or implementing the new paradigm — beyond the further conceptual development created by articles in this volume — requires work at least in five different interconnected and interrelated arenas:

**(a) Communication:** We must change the modes through which global Jewish discourse is conducted – from a bilateral US-Israel conversation towards a more orchestrated round-table conversation which enriches content and tasks towards a stronger sense of Peoplehood. To that end – new structures and forums have to be established in order to facilitate such a global conversation.

**(b) Language.** The new paradigm ought to choose its vocabulary and its language in a way which strengthens Jewish Peoplehood. Hebrew should become the spoken language of the Jewish people on two distinct levels, even for those Jews whose mother tongue is not Hebrew. The first is a basic communication-level Hebrew, which allows every Jew to communicate with each other. The second is conversational Hebrew that will allow Jews to actually express themselves beyond basic communication. New Hebrew teaching schemes ought to be developed and pursued which will allow, among other things, a stronger connection between Jews and Israelis around the world. "Hebrew Centers," part of Israel's culture houses, should find their place near Jewish synagogues and Jewish centers throughout the world, aiming to reach the Jewish community as well as non-Jews, overcoming the risks and threats associated with an Israeli reach-out.

**(c) Values.** As indicated here by Yossi Abramowitz, the new paradigm requires the identification of values which are uniquely Jewish and will serve, as Abramowitz phrases it, "as the new DNA of our religion, nationalism and culture". President Peres and his dedicated team rightfully choose to focus the opening event of the 2008 "Facing Tomorrow" conference around the duty of tikkun olam, one of the most Jewish of all our values. These Jewish values will be pursued throughout the world by Jewish organizations, networks or projects such as Israeli Flying Aid, Jewish Social Action Month, American Jewish World Service, and many others.

**(d) Actions:** The last paradigm shift that the Jewish people underwent was from emancipation and assimilation to Herzl's practical Zionism. Zionist actions were easy to

understand if challenging to implement. Coming to Eretz Yisrael, cultivating the land, building a society and finally establishing a state – all were clear tasks that are still being implemented today. What are the actions that can be derived from the new paradigm? In this volume, many writers identified actions which ought to be developed in order to actualize Peoplehood. Unlike Zionism, which had clear actions associated with it, including the ultimate goal of making aliya, the new paradigm carries no clear and inherent priorities. Stemming from its networked structure, as discussed below, no priorities are given within the long list of directions suggested here, for example, by Deborah Housen-Curiel.

**(e) Structure:** The fifth dimension which has to be revised and renewed in order to support the new paradigm is the structural one. In a previous volume of Peoplehood Papers, Dr. Shlomi Ravid phrased the challenge as "the need to explore what it means to be an institutional expression of Jewish Peoplehood in the 21st century and how it should shape and impact the future mission of Jewish institutions."<sup>31</sup>

Answering this challenge requires understanding the logic of networks.<sup>32</sup> First level networks are networks that people join in order to meet others - alike or not necessarily so. From LinkedIn, Facebook and even JDate, we are surrounded with virtual and less virtual first level networks. Second level networks are those that, beyond the first level characteristics, are designed around a certain organizing principle, a shared vision or sense of mission. People who might differ on other things are connected — physically or virtually – through certain links to people with whom they share a certain commonality. A Jewish congregation can serve as a good example for second level network.

Third level networks are operational networks — networks that have an organizing principle, a shared vision, and an obligation for the people in the network to act, to perform, or to execute whatever each individual considers or interprets as the purpose of the network. Al-Qaida and the network of the global Jihad is an unfortunate effective third level network.

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<sup>31</sup> [http://www.ujc.org/local\\_includes/downloads/26210.pdf](http://www.ujc.org/local_includes/downloads/26210.pdf)

<sup>32</sup> The logic of networks refers to the newly defined science of networks in the social, rather than engineering world, and it is closely read with Chaos Theory and Complexity Science. For the evolution of the network science see: S. Wasserman and K. Faust, Social Network Analysis, A. Barabasi, Linked: the New Science of Networks.

Networks have no formal leadership, no hierarchy, and are self-regulated — everything that the organized Jewish world is not. The world, however, is moving from organizations and formal institutions to mobilizing masses and constituencies through effective networks. Hence, in order to operationalize the new Peoplehood paradigm and its intertwined communication, language, values and actions dimensions, a dramatic shift in structure is required: a shift towards a network-structured institutionalization.

Network-structured institutionalization requires three types of interventions, which can be executed simultaneously through an almost-chaotic web of local and global Jewish institutions, linked through individuals and actions: (a) a comprehensive revision of existing Jewish organizations, (b) the establishment of new Jewish institutions and networks and (c) strengthening of existing global Jewish networks.

The followings are some examples of the types of structural changes required under each one of these three interventions.

**(a)** Existing Jewish organizations and institutions must change or they will lose relevance in the Jewish world and will be replaced, practically and operationally, by other dynamic and more up-to-date structures.

Prime Minister Olmert referred to this point in his June 2008 JAFI address: "The Government of Israel has to assume much greater responsibility for the Jewish future worldwide. In practical terms, greater responsibility translates into greater investment... The time has now come for the Jewish Agency to assume the additional responsibility of being the agent of the State of Israel for preserving the Jewish future. In order to fulfill this new and amplified mission, the Jewish Agency will need to re-evaluate its current structure, management and governance – a process, which I know is already underway."

A necessary structural change that would affect both the Israeli government and the Jewish Agency, is to turn JAFI into an operational arm, an executive agency, of the State of Israel with the important task will be to bring the global Jewish agenda into Israeli official policies.

Other global Jewish organizations will have to revise their modes of operation including the United Jewish Community's activities and the World Jewish Congress which is in the

process of creating constitutional changes which will allow it to become, once again, an operational representative body.

**(b)** New institutions need to be established in order to support the new paradigm. One of these, as advocated by Professor Yehezkel Dror, is the establishment of a constitutional consultative body in Israel which will represent world Jewry in Israeli internal decision making.

This idea is highly debatable within the Jewish world, and its practicalities are still far from being agreed upon and accepted. However, such a constitutional body reflects more than anything else the new paradigm of People-centric Jewish world. This type of new institutions is still far from Daniel Elazar's vision<sup>33</sup> of global Jewish governance, but in answering the dynamic nature of global phenomena, it will take an appropriate step towards coordinated Jewish actions, either as a response to threats or in taking a leading role in answering global challenges such as environment or moral dilemma emerging from advance science.

During the 2008 "Facing Tomorrow" conference, the organizing committee made a courageous political attempt to move in these directions. One of the sessions brought together Jewish leaders such as Ronald Lauder, Zeev Bielski, Alan Dershowitz, Arik Carmon, Isaac Herzog, Malcolm Hoenlein and Pierre Besnainou, in an attempt to discuss decision-making processes. These leaders could not reach any agreement or accept the fact that decisions in the Jewish world would not necessarily need to be done in a power-politic setting. Their inability to engage in a constructive dialogue that went beyond their organizations' achievements or who-controls-what, was so evident that the only brave attempt made by Pierre Besnainou, neither an American nor an Israeli, to present a platform for discussion was hardly mentioned, and completely disregarded by world Jewry leaders. These men (perhaps it is relevant to note that there were no women on the panel) failed at that event, and fail since then, to see the depth of the required change in their organizations. Jewish organizations, rather than connect themselves in a web of personal and professional ties, still maintain their political rivalries in a lost quest for political power which is no longer relevant for the challenges facing the Jewish people.

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<sup>33</sup> D. Elazar, Reinventing World Jewry: How to design the World Jewish Polity.  
<http://www.jcpa.org/dje/articles3/rwjintro.htm>



(c) The third required intervention towards a network-structure institutionalization is to strengthen global Jewish networks. Networks such as the Nahum Goldman Fellowship alumni, the Wexner Fellows alumni, KolDor<sup>34</sup> and even the WJC Jewish Diplomats, a networked structure within the traditional WJC organization, serve today as the breeding fields for Peoplehood ideas and actions.

While in the past Jewish leaders were identified by the organization they were leading or involved with, the leaders of tomorrow will emerge from the multiple roles they play in Jewish institutions and in their proven capability to mobilize local or global Jewish collective actions.

The Jewish world is undergoing a paradigm shift from the classic Zionist, State-centric paradigm towards a People-centric one. Its definition is still in the making, but the sense that the existing structures, conversations and leaderships fall short of addressing the local and global challenges Jewish communities are facing is only growing stronger. In order to operationalize the new paradigm, a shift is required in five different arenas: communication, language, values, actions and structure. This article indicated the three necessary interventions required to support the network-structured institutionalization process: a significant revision in the major Jewish organizations, the establishment of new institutions which will reflect the new paradigm and the strengthening of the existing networks in the Jewish people.

I do hope that the ideas presented here will generate objections. Since the days of Hillel and Shammai, it is clear that consensus has never been a Jewish value, and fierce debates were always a much needed dimension in paradigm shifts.

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<sup>34</sup> At the 2007 KolDor conference more than 100 Jewish networks and organizations were represented through the participation of 120 young Jewish leaders. It was towards that conference that KD lay leader, Sandy Antignas, who also serves as a lay leader at the UJA-Federation of New York, coined the term: *a network of networks*.

# The State, the People and the Promise

By Seth Cohen

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**T**he State of Israel. It is a passion, a project, and perhaps more than anything else, it is a promise. Not only a promise that has been kept, it also a promise that we are all challenged to keep. Regardless of whether you live there or here (and where you are reading this will define your own personal ‘there’ and ‘here’) it is likely that the passion one has for the vitality of the State of Israel is equaled only in magnitude by the intensity of the opinion one has have about what the State represents.

Notwithstanding the fact that our collective unity of passion that is balanced by our collective diversity of opinion, each *Shabbos* morning we find a common voice to pray for the welfare of the State of Israel. In that common voice, we pray for leadership, strength and protection of the State and its leaders, but curiously enough, we also pray for something else. In addition to our prayers for the “State” of Israel, we also say a prayer for the “Family” of Israel when, we pray:

*V'es achaynu kol bays yisroayl pkod no b'chol artzos p'zuray-hem v'solichaym m'hayro kom'miyus l'tzion irecho v'lirusholayim mishkan sh'mecho.* “And visit all of Brethren of the house of Israel, in all the lands where they are scattered, and bring them rapidly to Zion, Your city and to Jerusalem, where you name lives.

There is significance in this recital, because it demonstrates that even at the center of a prayer for the State, we include a prayer for the People. The State and the People are intertwined in liturgy just as they are in life, and this portion of text from our siddur helps beg the imperative as much as the question – just as we must be mindful of the State and the People in the same breathes of our prayers, we must continue to be mindful of the challenges and opportunities we face in strengthening and binding the relationship between the People of Israel and the State of Israel.

And out of that mindfulness comes two critical questions.

First, in this era when so many Jews view the State as a much-maligned governmental entity rather than an embodiment of the promise of the Jewish people, how do we engage

the State in a way that strengthens the aspirations (spiritual, cultural or otherwise) of the People? And second, how do we create such engagement between the State and the People when we are still striving to understand the concept of Jewish Peoplehood and the modern contours of the Jewish People?

In an effort to answer these two questions, I suggest we first more closely examine the way we understand the concept of the State of Israel and I propose we dispense with the view of it as a sovereign and structured political entity and approach it more as conception of governmentality maintained for a much higher purpose. Accordingly, I suggest that one useful analysis is the formulation the role of government (and the concept of governmentality) as articulated by the French philosopher Michael Foucault – who wrote:

“[W]hereas the end of sovereignty is internal to itself and possess its own intrinsic instruments in the shape of its laws, the finality of government resides in the things it manages and in the pursuit of the perfection and intensification of the processes it directs, and the instruments of government, instead of being laws, now come to be a range of multiform tactics.”

Informing our framing the role of the State of Israel with respect to the engagement of the People by using Foucault’s observations as an aid, the first question to ask is: what are the essential matters that the State manages and the processes it directs? And accordingly, what are the multiform tactics that it can use in perfecting such processes? On a very basic level, we must acknowledge that the State of Israel does such things that other states do – it provides for the common defense, administers a system of laws and justice that protects property, life and liberty. It also gives its citizens equal opportunities to voice pride and complaint with respect to the policies maintained by the government. But if that were all that we expected from the State of Israel, these simple instruments of sovereignty – military power, laws, and electoral mechanics, the State of Israel would be no different than any other nation-state with such similar instruments.

And we hold, collectively, that the State of Israel is different than other states. We assign to it a different role and a different standard of conduct. Don’t we?

Yes, we the Jewish People expect more from our State than any other nation-state. We expect the processes that it helps direct include no less than processes that support the

strengthening and the survival of the Jewish People. We expect that the processes and actions of the State embody Jewish ideals and the earthly manifestation of Jewish values. We expect that the Jewish State persevere as a homeland to those individuals who do not yet physically call Israel home, but nonetheless articulate a sense of ownership as if they lived there and never left. It is a place of rescue and a conception of Jewish strength.

It is in light of the aspirations that the People harbor for the State of Israel, and the processes that the State must perfect to achieve these aspirations, in which we must frame the relationship between the State of Israel and the Jewish people. We must more thoroughly examine the ways these processes can be perfected and the role of the People (in the broadest sense of the word) in enabling such perfection. And I submit that the search for perfection cannot be achieved merely by evaluating and improving the classical instruments of sovereignty. The tactics exercised by the State must be more than the tools currently at the State's disposal, but must be re-imagined to become multiform in nature. And the People must serve as engaged, educated and empowered instruments in the ever-perfecting aspects of the State's manifestation as an embodiment of the People.

So how do we re-imagine these multiform tactics? We must first create a more enduring framework in which the People who are in the Diaspora engage in ongoing cultural and spiritual dialogue with the People in *Eretz Yisrael*. We must harness technology to create new avenues of dialogue that infuse the institutions of the State with the experiences of its People. We must transcend the often-tenuous debate between the State and the “organized Jewish community” in the United States and focus on ways that the “unorganized” elements of the Jewish world can interact with the State in diverse and colorful ways.

We must much more frequently bring together great consortiums of Jewish people – thinkers, artists, scientists, theologians and activists, under the auspices of initiatives of the State so that the State itself, as an embodiment of its People, takes a role in the binding of those same People together. And lastly, we must find a way that the pluralism of spiritual identities that is so firmly rooted in each corner of the Diaspora also takes root in *Eretz Yisrael*, so that those voices are emboldened and the State, through its ministrations of that which it is sovereign, takes note of those voices and governs accordingly.

There is much to do in both realizing the promise of the Jewish State and enabling its instruments (the People) in that endeavor, and we must embolden the State to do so. Such

emboldening includes the new forms of relationship between the State and its People – as well as reframing the expectations they have for one another and the manner of investment which can help meet and exceed those expectations. However, as I referenced earlier, there is a second question that must be examined with equal intensity is how we can bind the State and the People closer together when we still struggle to define what that the essence of Jewish Peoplehood really is?

Perhaps, the answer to this section question lies at the heart of the answer to the first questions. Previously I have posited that the meaning of Jewish Peoplehood is best understood within the context of the collective journeying of the Jewish People. In many ways, the State is no different. Viewed as an embodiment of Jewish journeying, the State is a form of mass transit of the Jewish People – envisioned by Jewish passion, built by Jewish ingenuity and defended by Jewish blood. In its process of self-perfection and its journey of self-discovery, the State is on a journey forward towards its ultimate Jewish purpose – just like the Jews that individually (and collectively) journey forward into their own individual Jewish futures.

Perhaps, rather than struggling with the question of defining Peoplehood is as precedent to understanding the People's relationship with the State, we should more specifically simply posit that the State is a key vehicle in developing a greater understanding of journeying of the Jewish people in these modern times. Following this recognition, we then can place greater emphasis on the State, as an organic entity that is a form of mass Jewish journeying, can be a leader in creating individualized and collective pathways of Jewish journeying – which ultimately enhances Jewish Peoplehood.

So back to our prayer... when we pray for the State of Israel we must recognize that within that prayer we voice an aspiration as well as an imperative – that while the State must be safe and secure, our prayer for the State cannot be fulfilled unless the family of Jewish People are brought closer to it, to both strengthen the State and be strengthened by it. Because in the end (just as in its beginning), the Jewish State is more than a nation state, and it is more than our collective project. It is the embodiment of the promise of its People, wherever they may be. The State, the People and the Promise are inextricably linked and undeniably important. Each helps solve the riddles of the other two, and together they give shape to our collective purpose. Each requires new ways of engagement

and understanding, dialogue and decision. But most of all, each requires that we believe in its respective importance to the future of Jewish life – because that future is the sum of all three combined.

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## Israel at the “Center”? An Impossible Dream in a 21<sup>st</sup> Century Network

By Tally Zingher<sup>35</sup>

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**S**hould Israel be at the center of the Jewish People? The question is entirely anachronistic—in a networked world there is no such thing as a “center.” Merely the aspiration to become a center, therefore, leads to a severe relevancy gap between today’s reality and policies undertaken in pursuit of “centrality.” The modern day equivalent of a “center” or “centrality” is that of being the most relevant node, or “node relevance.” Israel should therefore aspire to be the most relevant node in the network of the global Jewish people, and perhaps, with some great ambition, in the broader global network of humanity. A node with high node relevance is one to which the most nodes feel connected, shaped, influencing or influenced. Israel’s success in becoming the most relevant node in the network of global Jewish Peoplehood will be determined by the extent to which Israel succeeds in (1) leveraging global resources, (2) serving individualized needs and (3) co-creating value, meaning and connectivity with communities and individuals outside of Israel.

In this paper, I respond to the question of Israel’s centrality within the Jewish people with the insights of recent business management literature on globalization and innovation within globalized organizations and firms. Specifically, C.K. Prahalad and M.S. Krishnan in their The Age of Innovation: Driving Co-Created Value Through Global Networks, provide insights as to how successful firms thrive in today’s new globalized market structure by leveraging global resources to co-create individualized value. By allowing a modern understanding of the role and functioning of networks in the 21<sup>st</sup> century to shed some light on our ambitions for the global Jewish community, we create the possibility of building institutions that will serve the needs of the future, rather than those of the past. While applying popular business literature to the mission of the State of Israel may seem

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<sup>35</sup> The model presented in this paper has been significantly influenced by recent business management literature on globalization and innovation within globalized organizations and firms, specifically, C.K. Prahalad and M.S. Krishnan, The New Age of Innovation: Driving Co-Created Value Through Global Networks, McGraw Hill (2008), as well as by the thoughtful reflections on networked Judaism compiled in Hayim Herring and Barry Shrage, Jewish Networking: Linking People, Institutions, Community, edited by Zachary I. Heller, The Susan & David Wilstein Institute of Jewish Policy Studies (2001).

overly simplistic and lacking in adequate gravitas for the spiritual and national endeavor of the Zionist state, I introduce these concepts because they reflect new paradigms that characterize the reality of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, whether or not we choose to acknowledge and learn from them. This is not to say it would not be nice if the world functioned in a less complex manner, enabling “center”-hood. Such a worldview, however, simply no longer reflects reality.

The network of global Jewish Peoplehood is comprised of a wide variety of nodes, with each node itself comprised of its own complex network. Nodes within the network of the Jewish People include geographic-community-defined nodes, institution-defined nodes, and individual nodes. Geographic-community-defined nodes include nodes such as the communities of Brookline, Massachusetts, Buenos Aires and Australia. Institution-defined nodes include nodes such as federations, synagogues, denominational or non-denominational movements, community organizations such as the European Union of Jewish Students and social justice organizations like the American Jewish World Service. Of course, the network of global Jewish Peoplehood also contains individuals, or individual-person-defined nodes that may have few or very tenuous links to other nodes in the network. Any one person belongs to multiple nodes (professional, religious, social, interest-based, etc.) within and without the network of the global Jewish people.

In the network of global Jewish Peoplehood, nodes connect to one another directly as well as indirectly through other nodes. Although all nodes in the network of the global Jewish People are interconnected through multiple indirect connections across the network, at no point can any node control all (or even a substantial) part of the activity that occurs across the network. In this networked world, there is no one node to which all Jews or all nodes feel identified. Absence of such a singularly important node creates an opportunity for relevant nodes (i.e., Israel) to emerge and shape other nodes as well as to create new or strengthened connections for previously disconnected nodes. For example, whether a British and a Brazilian Jew connect over Israeli pop music, American Jewish fiction or traditional prayer community reflects the node relevance of each these nodes.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> In such a network, nodes serve an important function of creating closer connections between nodes where no connections may have been visible. For example, while a secular American Jew may feel that she has little that connects her to an ultra-Orthodox Jerusalemite, and a secular *kibbutz*nik may feel he has little that connects him to an ultra-orthodox woman in Paris, potential for shared connections, whether through religious Zionists, secular Israelis, traditionally observant Americans or through shared hobbies or interests abound in a networked world.



Israel has the capacity to be (and by some measures already is) the most vibrant, innovative, rich and deep node in the network of the Jewish world. On some dimensions, Israel already is the most relevant node in that it is the physical cradle of our religious identity and destiny and is the location of our people's history dating back thousands of years. Israel's existing node relevance partly stems from the extent to which Israel contains elements of almost every other node in the network of Jewish Peoplehood.

A word about the concept of the networked world and why the node relevance model is a paradigm shift worthy of incorporating into our thinking about Israel: Individuals, organizations and firms are shifting away from hierarchical structures and pre-determined access. We can see this model for Israel as the complement to the now well-known long-tail theory.<sup>37</sup> If, as posited by the theory of the long tail, the structure of today's economy and technology enables individuals with non-mainstream tastes and non-mainstream ideas to influence the mainstream, organizations in general and Israel specifically must learn to harness and be relevant to those in the long tail.

This network-based approach does not diminish the importance of Israel but creates new channels and opportunities for engagement with Israel, challenging Israel to play a key role in the configuration of the global Jewish community. The network-based approach and modern technology enables us to build on the vision of Ahad Ha'am acknowledging the deep interconnectedness and mutual dependence of Jews living inside and outside Israel. Despite Israel's monumental historic/religious importance, the notion of Israel as the center of global Jewish Peoplehood is outdated and belongs to center vs. periphery thinking that is irrelevant in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and does not resonate for the younger generation or our community's future leaders. Consider for example, where is the center of the Internet? Where is Google's center? While hardware and servers may be in one location, content, marketing and software, all major contributors to Google's total value, are dispersed across the planet.

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<sup>37</sup> The long tail theory describes the phenomenon whereby declining costs of production and distribution enable narrowly-targeted goods and services reflecting non-mainstream tastes to be as economically attractive as mainstream one-size-fits all products, enabling individuals once neglected by marketers as the long-tail part of the consumer distribution curve to impact the mainstream. Chris Anderson, [The Long Tail: Why the Future of Business is Selling Less of More](#), Hyperion (2006). For more information see, <http://www.thelongtail.com/about.html>. Exploration of alternatives to mainstream (Israel and non-Israel-related, Jewish and non-Jewish) thought and trends is facilitated by the long-tail phenomenon.

## **1. Israel Must Leverage Global Resources**

In a networked world, organizations, firms and communities thrive not by owning, controlling or hoarding resources, but by connecting to a global ecosystem of resources and maintaining access to these resources. Resources (people, ideas, money) need not be kept locked up within in Israel but the country will thrive by having access to and knowing how best to engage and influence these resources across *klal yisrael*. Vertical integration within a firm or country along the lines of the classic Ford assembly line, is no longer tenable in today's world, nor is it strategic. For example, scientific research, Jewish text study and thoughtful reflection on Jewish values may be considered resources possessed by members of the global Jewish community. It is not vital that all of the people who are engaged in these activities physically move to Israel or make *aliyah*. Rather, Israel will thrive from connecting and being relevant to those who are considered a resource or are engaged in developing these resources. Furthermore, maintaining some of these resources outside of Israel may in fact strengthen Israel within the fabric of the global network.

## **2. Individuals as Unique Contributors: Individualized Tastes and Capacities to Contribute Must be Serviced and Targeted**

Today's default focus is on the individual. Building community in such an individualized world with high expectations of customization is a formidable challenge, but this need not mean the neglect of the notion of community. Rather, it means that we must understand that people are drawn to a larger sense of collectivism through more specific ways and entry points than in generations past. Individuals today assess the value of participating in a community based on their unique personalized experiences.

People are now unwilling to conform their needs to a one-size fits all mentality so organizations must adapt. Jews, particularly those under the age of 50, are bypassing Jewish institutions (and Israel) when constructing their Jewish identity. The individualized approach mandated today is beyond mass customization (which now is taken as a given) and is about understanding the behavior, needs and skills of individual consumers and co-creating with them a value proposition unique to them. Without such customization, the global Jewish community and Israel will both miss the opportunity to benefit from and engage these individuals. Nodes that offer a one-size fits all or even a menu-based approach to attracting young Jews to their mission fail to realize that organizations can no

longer succeed by dictating the agenda for engagement. Without connecting, understanding and listening to individuals in an authentic manner, the path of the individuals that comprise the Jewish people the path of Jewish institutions, including the State of Israel.

### **3. Israel Must Effectively Co-Create Meaning and Value with Individuals and Communities around the Globe**

Co-creation of value means thinking and acting creatively about how both participants in a relationship give and receive to further the interests and aims of both parties. Israel's engagement with Jews and non-Jews around the world must be cognizant of this. To maintain, or build its node relevance, therefore, Israel must engage in a conversation with a variety Jewish individuals and communities around the globe, creating space for a rich two-way relationship so that individuals are engaged in a manner that is authentic to their Judaism and in a framework in which they maintain responsibility and accountability for their actions and identity. This process of relationship building requires up-front investment of time on the part of all participants. It requires open and honest thinking about what individuals can offer Israel and their community and what Israel can offer them.

### **4. Opportunities for Node-Relevancy Increasing Steps Abound**

Co-creation of value builds a shared stake and sense of ownership in the endeavor of the global Jewish People. One way for Israel to build this shared stake is to resist the temptation to hoard resources and instead to build resources and capacity for Jewish engagement outside of Israel. Engagement of Jews and non-Jews around the world on deep existential questions that affect the interests of the global Jewish community is one way to co-create such value. The process of co-creation of value acknowledges that not only those in the Diaspora but Israel and her citizens, too, have something deep to gain from this conversation.

Israel's node relevance, therefore, depends on the extent to which Israel shapes/influences individuals' sense of belonging to the global Jewish People through local or global channels. Jews, even those with rich institutional affiliation live in multiple communities and belong to multiple nodes, inside and outside the Jewish community. To the extent

Israel is a facilitator for people to explore their own Jewish identity, Israel has high node relevance. Initiatives that seek to locate, connect to individuals and to harness ideas and initiatives taking place outside of Israel, whether in the policy, action, theory or religious sphere, are relevancy increasing with respect to the node of Israel.

As concrete examples have been lacking from this discussion, I point to two examples of ways in which Israeli leaders have furthered Israel's node relevance:

David Ben Gurion, in his less technologically advanced day, understood the importance of Israel in the context of the global network. Directed by a government committee to consult with Jewish sages in Israel and abroad on the question of "who is a Jew" for the purpose of the right of return related to the child of intermarried parents, Ben Gurion sent letters to 50 Jewish intellectuals and opinion leaders around the world, ranging from Germany, Italy to the United States seeking their thoughts on the question. Ben Gurion could have addressed this issue, as he had done so for many similar issues, as a purely Israeli issue rather than a matter of global Jewish Peoplehood. However, by engaging Jewish leaders in locations such as Haifa, Paris, Rome and New York, he tapped into ideas and thinking across the globe to enhance the ideas being considered in Jerusalem and gave Jews from around the world a stake in the outcome, thus increasing Israel's node relevance across the network of the global Jewish people.<sup>38</sup>

The President's conference of May 2008 initiated and organized by the office of President Shimon Peres and the Jewish People Policy Planning Institute is another relevancy-increasing undertaking for the Israeli node in the network of the global Jewish people. At the President's conference Israel served as a convening forum. The aim of the conference (at least explicitly) was not to persuade all of the three thousand or so participants to move to Israel or invest in Israel, rather the conference served to connect influential thinkers, business leaders and individuals to one another through Israel. By rejecting the temptation

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<sup>38</sup> For more information see Eliezer Ben-Refael, *Jewish Identities: Fifty Intellectuals Answer Ben Gurion*, Brill (Leiden, Boston 2002). It is worth noting that not all of the Jewish leaders engaged by Ben Gurion's letters saw his global Jewish Peoplehood approach as a constructive one. Many, including Rabbi Toaff of Italy, for example, rejected the notion that Jews outside of Israel had the right to comment and determine this matter when the state of Israel had its own Rabbinate. ("It is highly offensive to ignore the very important point of acknowledging the opinion of the rabbis of the State of Israel as an authorized judicial body. It is a slap in the face to all the religious institutions the world over to detract from the authority of the Israeli rabbis who are the recognized supreme body of religion and Judaism.")

to hoard resources from around the global network of opinion-leaders and ideas, and by choosing instead to harness global resources and to engage individuals in key issues that will shape our world, Israel magnified its node relevance.

Although the identification of specific action-items to increase Israel's node relevance today requires collaborative and serious thinking and analysis of the existing landscape of activity within the network of the Jewish People, some potential node relevancy-increasing actions include (1) the creation of an ongoing forum for engagement of individuals and nodes around the world in key policy issues affecting Israel and other Jews around the globe ranging from Jerusalem, to anti-Semitism, to religious pluralism; (2) the creation of a reverse Birthright/Taglit program or a trans-national Birthright program whereby young Jews from different communities around the world (including Israel) spend time engaging in exploration trips in other Jewish communities around the world; and (3) facilitation of a method for the co-creation of value through targeted engagement of individuals with common (not necessarily Jewish-related) passions.

Success in the node relevance model requires, perhaps, above all else, a deep sense of the Jewish value of humility in entering into a Peoplehood-oriented relationship and conversation – a recognition that regardless of where we live, how we practice and why we identify, we each have something to contribute and learn from the global Jewish Peoplehood.

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## Peoplehood with Purpose

By Yosef Israel Abramowitz

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**T**here is a drastic need for a paradigm shift in planning for a strong Jewish future. With Western Jewry having the highest attrition rates of any religious group as well as the lowest belief-in-God-quotient, the 200-year pact the Jewish people have had with Western civilization, and each other, needs to be altered. And we must reconsider the place of Israel within a global values-based Peoplehood framework.

Jewish Peoplehood – and its universalistic, noble purpose – must replace the eroding definition of Jews as essentially a faith community. The historic choice made by the French Sanhedrin in answering Napoleon’s challenge – to define themselves as “Frenchmen of the Mosaic Faith” rather than as part of the Jewish people – ushered in a new era for humanity and for the Jewish people. Eviscerating our national characteristics paved the way for Jewish individuals as well as for Judaism to be both in law and in the public imagination equal to Christians and to Christianity.

The culture of individualism that is so defining of America and Western Jewry accelerated the equality of Jews and of Judaism. The greatest public relations coup of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was the mainstreaming of the term “Judaeo-Christian”, which means that 2% of the population had not only equality with the super majority of Americans, but even top billing. This served our community’s public policy interests and assimilationist yearnings.

This remarkable achievement must now be undone.

While there are indeed values that are shared by Judaism and Christianity, Christians have been far more aggressive in defining them in the public square and for everyday use. This blurring between Jewish and Christian values has eroded the unique purpose and identity of the Jews not only in the public’s eye, but among Jews themselves. If indeed Judaism and Christianity are similar, then creating a Jewish-Jewish household is less a priority than is finding a partner who shares basic values that can be loosely termed “Judaeo-Christian”, which has also often been a substitute for what many people may mean when they say “American.

So we inherit a history and people that must be mended. And appeals to religious solidarity are ineffective in a Jewish values vacuum among the people, our institutions and in the public imagination. We have to set our sights higher than those of most of our demographers, sociologists, community planners and philanthropists and become inspired advocates for a vision of Jewish Peoplehood in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

And we must start in the past.

**Peoplehood 1.0:** The first promise made to Abraham was that we were to become a “great nation”, or, more accurately “a large nation.” At Sinai, God commands the Jewish people to be a “holy nation.” In the days leading up to the destruction of the first Temple, nation, faith and land were fused together to create a special spiritual DNA that kept the premise of Peoplehood alive in later years without necessarily having the land as a living center.

**Peoplehood 2.0:** Then the nexus of faith and nationhood was challenged two hundred years ago and those who subsequently carried the flag of Peoplehood ended up carrying – or at least rooting for – the flag of Zion. The growth of the Zionist movement as a nationalistic movement 100 years ago further accentuated the Napoleonic split of the Jewish people between faith and nation, thus accepting artificial, non-Jewish frameworks for our own self-definition and organization. The growth of Zionism was not only an historic imperative to secure a haven but also often a backlash against the characterization of the Jewish people as a faith community and often an old-world and legalistic one.

The Enlightenment era spawned many great thinkers about the Jewish condition. Perhaps the one least understood, most ignored and most relevant for understanding Jewish Peoplehood today is Ahad Ha’am. Let’s dispense with the ideological battle about the urgency of Jewish settlement, which history correctly gave to Herzl and his successors. But listen closely to some other writings of Ahad Ha’am that can help us win the larger war for the entire Jewish people.

- “If, as we hope, there is to be a third (Jewish commonwealth) its fundamental principle, on the national as on the individual plane, will be neither the ascendancy of the body over spirit, nor the suppression of the body for the spirit’s sake, but the uplifting of the body by the spirit.”
- Ahad Ha’am warned that Jewish communities outside of Israel do not have “any defense against the ocean of foreign culture, which threatens to obliterate our

national characteristics and traditions, and thus gradually to put an end of our existence as a people."

- "Judaism... shall have as its focus point the ideal of our nation's unity and its free development through the expression of universal human values in the terms of its own distinctive spirit. This is the conception of Judaism on which our education and our literature must be based."

**Peoplehood 3.0** belongs to Ahad Ha'am—and to us. All movements need its heroes, ideological founding parent, and source texts. Faith or nationalism can no longer be the grand unifying field theory of world Jewry. Only Peoplehood can because it is inherently inclusive and encompasses religion, nationalism and culture. The goal should be for a critical mass of our institutions, endeavors, philanthropists and leaders to be engines and agents of Peoplehood.

How to do that?

By recognizing that Jewish values are the building blocks of vibrant Jewish Peoplehood. Jewish values must be the new DNA of our religion, nationalism and culture. It's always been there but we usually fail at crystallizing what they are, where they came from, how they can be expressed in everyday life and how they inform the actions of our people. Or link them to a larger mission for the Jewish people.

Shared values are a trademark of a people and can be equally relevant to those who consider themselves faith Jews as by those who are nationalists or cultural Jews. And Jewish values are not "owned" by any denomination or political party or kind of Jew. We will need to define Jewish values in order to have them be shared.

What are Jewish values?

There are two kinds that the AVI CHAI-sponsored Babaganewz educational team has been teaching to Jewish kids in 3500 classrooms: Distinctive Jewish values and those values that are shared with other faith communities or western civilization. Babaganewz.com is a Jewish values-based Jewish kids magazine, website and teacher's guide used in 3,500 classrooms) There are actually very few distinctive Jewish values—Talmud Torah, Yediat Eretz Yisrael (knowledge of the land of Israel), Areivut (mutual responsibility), etc – so most values are those we seem to share with others.



Yet we must be moral archaeologists and dig deeper into those values to find the distinctive Jewish differentiation in either defining, understanding, or, most importantly, expressing and acting on those values – particularly in the context of community. Aligning the educational institutions, or at least messages, across world Jewry's institutions and instruments of communication to promote Jewish values is a necessity.

And Jewish values are most effectively lived not only in the context of inter-dependency of people, but also in relation to Jewish time and also to Jewish action. When Christianity elevated the place of belief over action, it divorced values from obligation. When Jews come together to marry values, time and action, our moral contribution is most powerful and it is an expression of Jewish Peoplehood's greatest attributes.

Our struggle for communal re-definition is not an isolated struggle but is mirrored in the State of Israel and in other Jewish communities around the world. This would suggest the need for a core curriculum of Jewish values upon which all educational endeavors could draw from and from which to hopefully coordinate (Peoplehood time) would be a strategic asset to build. Often this idea becomes confused with calls for a core curriculum of Jewish literacy, which is important, but is not necessarily a core curriculum of Jewish values. Jewish Social Action Month (JSAM) during the month of Cheshvan is a great example of 21<sup>st</sup> century Peoplehood time that is open to all kinds of Jews to participate worldwide.

A final word: Peoplehood will not work as a rallying cry to the Jewish public, which is post-tribal in its inclinations and commitments. Peoplehood is, rather, an organizing principle to recalibrate and synchronize the Jewish enterprise and philanthropy. It is our future blue-print.

And because the centripetal forces of Western civilization are more powerful forces on the individual than the gravitational force of Peoplehood, then we must increase the density of Peoplehood in order to increase its gravitational pull. The density is created certainly by promoting shared Jewish values and particularism through formal and informal education married to constant opportunities for meaningful action in the larger world.

Of course we need more philanthropy from Jews to go to the infrastructure of Jewry but we will fail to expand the circle of Jewish giving over the long run (within one generation of transfer of wealth) as long as the case is perceived to be parochial. And so

Peoplehood's pull can be strengthened exponentially if it is Peoplehood With Purpose rather than Peoplehood for Parochialism.

Before jumping into the challenge of defining what Jewish Peoplehood, it is important for the community to struggle with a mission statement for the Jews. Without it, we will continue to wander aimlessly in the desert, even amid good intentions. And so Jewish Peoplehood is simply the glue and essence and state-of-being of the people who express and transmit the Purpose.

So the most essential question then becomes what's the purpose of the Jewish people in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century?

I think it is what it has always been: To be an on-going, distinctive catalyst for the advancement and evolution of morality in civilization. And now that I'm running a solar energy company in Israel, I think it is also to be a Renewable Light Unto the Nations. All the rest is commentary.

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## Israel and the Jewish Nation

By Yossi Beilin

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**W**hen in the mid-90s I attempted to persuade Jewish and Israeli institutions and wealthy members of the Jewish community to implement what several years later became Birthright, I attracted considerable criticism in Israel. At the Knesset Absorption Committee I was asked why Israel had to contribute to funding the costs of youngsters from well-to-do families, spending ten days in Israel, when there was still poverty in Israel. My reply was that Israel, as a Jewish country, was committed to the continuity of the Jewish people and that this had to be its main priority whether or not Diaspora Jews considered Israel responsible for this. Today few argue with me over the success of Birthright, although there are still some who view it as a luxury. I feel that Israel will lose its right to exist if its main concern is not focused on the issue of Jewish continuity.

Israel is an unparalleled solution, although its very existence generates dilemmas and questions for the Jewish people which it has not previously addressed. It is the only place in the world where, when you leave the room, no one says behind your back: “you know he’s a Jew?!”, and it is the only place in the world where a Jew can become a citizen and make his home without quotas, without favors and without tests. In this respect, it meets the original Zionist intent, and we haven’t even mentioned the democratic and economic success story, science and culture, education and the Hebrew language.

But Israel constitutes a new problem, the aspects of which were not entirely considered by the Zionist visionaries – the unprecedented concentration of Jews in one place which, as such, is vulnerable to an existential threat through weapons of mass destruction. This is a danger to which the Jewish Diaspora is not exposed. In its policies and actions, and in the ideas expressed by its leaders, Israel generates threats to the Jews of the world, creates pretexts for modern anti-Semitism, and creates dangers results from the fact that there are those who seek to harm Jews around the world as a means of gaining revenge against Israel.

Israel also creates a dilemma for the Jews of the world, and a 60-year problem with the issue of loyalty. Even if the Jews of the world are primarily loyal to the countries in which live, they are often asked to demonstrate particular loyalty to their home country, so they are not viewed as being patriotic to Israel. This is a delicate issue which Diaspora Jews have to address wisely, and which Israel has to take into consideration.

In the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, a new picture of global Jewry is emerging in which there are communities of equal size in Israel and in North America, and together they comprise about 85% of all the Jews in the world. Almost all the remaining Jews live in developed countries from which they have no intention of emigrating. The main problem for most of the Jewish people today pertains to the question of Jewish continuity, as most Israeli Jews are not religious or identified with institutionalized communities, and most of the Jews who live outside Israel do not provide their children with Jewish education.

The primary issue for the leaders of the Diaspora is that of Jewish continuity, and this is an area of increasing concern in view of the high percentage of Jews who are marrying non-Jews. Particularly since the 1990s, the question of the very existence of the Jewish people in the Diaspora one generation hence, other than among ultra-Orthodox Jews, is increasingly coming to the forefront.

Today, the greatest challenge faced by the leaders of the Jewish people is how to find their place in contemporary trends, grab a ride on globalization and on modern means of communication, and to come up with proposals that will allow continuity in a non-Orthodox age, with Israel acting a bridge, a Jewish meeting point – as the State of the Jews and as the only place where the issue of Jewish continuity does not exist, and where Jewish education and Jewish culture are available to all.

I hear criticism that Israel is not a Jewish enough country. This is an absurdity. It is, thank God, not a religious state but it is the only place in the world where a person can go through their whole life without entering a synagogue, and without there being any doubt over their Jewishness and Jewish identity. When my granddaughter comes back from kindergarten and recites the four questions from the Passover *seder*, and the tales of the Hasmoneans at Hanukkah and gets angry with Haman at Purim, no one in the world can tell me Israel is not Jewish enough.

Israel is an actual and potential home for all the Jews of the world. It has succeeded in creating a Jewish culture that changes with the spirit of the time, and it has a sense of responsibility towards the Jews of the world. The bond between the Jews of the world and Israel is constantly changing. If sixty years ago, the Jewish leadership in the United States asked Israel's first Prime Minister David Ben Gurion not to dare say that Israel represents the Jews of the world, so they would not be accused of dual loyalty, today Israel's leaders can say that openly, without attracting criticism from anyone. If in the past, there was a joint struggle to save Jews in distress, this struggle has ended and has been replaced with a joint effort to ensure the future existence of the Jewish people. If in the past, Israel was able to exist due, among other factors, to the generous donations from the Jewish people, in recent years Israel has contributed to educational and other activities in the Jewish world, and its economic stability has allowed it to fund various projects in the Jewish world itself.

It is not taken for granted that Israel is the center of the Jewish people. If it is important enough to it, Israel has to prove it with deeds, by developing Jewish studies, and offering appropriate role models. The ongoing debate between Israelis and Diaspora Jews with regard to the centrality of Israel is both superfluous and ridiculous. This is not an issue that will culminate in a showdown, rather with development over the coming years. What I feel is important, far more than the matter of centrality, is the issue of the relationship between the two great Jewish communities, for the sake of the future of both.

I find it hard to understand why there is no joint ongoing institutionalized forum for both these communities which addresses the issues that are important to both of them – such as Jewish education, dealing with attacks on Jews around the world, developing modern Jewish culture, addressing issues of marriage and divorce or conversion etc. How is it that encounters between the two communities are always accidental, or take place within outmoded frameworks, such as the World Zionist Congress, which only represents a small sector of the world's Jews, or the Jewish Agency which is fundamentally anachronistic and offers no real forum for discussion between the two communities, which could lay the foundation for decisions.

I am convinced of Israel's essential position as the country of the Jewish people, as it is the country of all its citizens. I see it as a democratic Jewish state that is proud with the way it has realized Zionism even though for a large part of the Jewish people who perished in the Holocaust it happened too late, and Herzl's desperate calls at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century were not adequately heeded. I say this, of course, alongside all the criticism I have of the continued Israeli occupation of the Territories, which is diametrically opposed to Jewish values and which endangers the Jewish majority in the near future. Relations between us and the Jews of the world must be equal, without any sense of superiority by any of us. Most of us find ourselves in a situation which we did not choose ourselves, rather because of the place where we were born. The real question is whether we are able to maintain a genuine common forum where we can raise problems and offer creative solutions. This will not happen in the institutions that exist today.

*Member of Knesset Yossi Beilin represents the Meretz Party.*

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

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

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

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

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

## **KolDor**

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