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A FRAMEWORK FOR STRATEGIC THINKING ABOUT
JEWISH PEOPLEHOOD

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INTRODUCTION

Since 2000, a small but growing number of Jewish organizations and foundations have started using the concept of “Jewish Peoplehood” in their work. What is the significance of this new concept? What is the added value of the “Jewish Peoplehood” concept for the world of Jewish organizations? Why use the concept as a basis for organizational development, whether for strategic planning, program development or fund raising? Is there a difference between an organization or program run under the banner of Jewish Peoplehood and one which is not?

We don’t aspire to answer all of these questions in this paper, but we do hope to make a first contribution towards organizing existing knowledge about the subject. The paper will be divided into the following four sections:

1) A Historical Overview

We begin with a short historical overview that focuses on the innovative nature of the Jewish Peoplehood concept. While “the Jewish People” is an ancient idea, the term “Jewish Peoplehood” as it is currently used, is very new. Whereas before 2000 the term was hardly used by Jewish organizations, today it is a central concept in the strategic planning of a growing number of leading Jewish organizations. As we will detail below, conferences are being held about the concept, books are being written, funders are giving increasing amounts of money to programs that use the Jewish Peoplehood concept and leading Jewish organizations are using Peoplehood as a central organizing concept. What is the historical significance of the sudden interest in the concept of Jewish Peoplehood?

2) A Guide to Current Intellectual Thought about Jewish Peoplehood

Alongside the use of the Peoplehood concept by Jewish organizations, there is a parallel growth of intellectual interest in the topic since 2000. The intellectual discussion asks: What is “Jewish Peoplehood?” What are the key characteristics that distinguish Jewish Peoplehood from other concepts? We will provide an overview of the main schools of intellectual thought about Jewish Peoplehood and provide summaries of the positions taken by leading Jewish thinkers on the topic. We will also sketch the intellectual boundaries of the Peoplehood concept, by asking “what is not Peoplehood?”

3) Translating Theory to Action

An applied theory of Peoplehood is needed if an organization is to create coherent answers to questions of “how” to develop programs and “what” are the appropriate standards for

measuring accomplishment and success. Unfortunately, little is currently being done to use intellectual discourse on Jewish Peoplehood as a basis for organizational planning.

Intellectual discussion about Jewish Peoplehood and the Jewish organizations which use the concept as an organizing banner currently exist on two different planes that rarely connect. On one hand, most organizations use the concept, out of a gut feeling that it will help them raise money and develop programs. On the other hand, most intellectuals are discussing the concept without reference to the world of Jewish organizations. The result are growing amounts of financial and personnel resources devoted to the concept of Jewish Peoplehood, without the level of planning and discussion needed to evaluate if there is any added value for the Jewish People.

We will provide an initial overview of foundations and organizations doing work in the field, and highlight the work of those that are making a serious attempt to bring the theory and practice of Jewish Peoplehood under one umbrella. We will also look at existing social science research that can serve as a resource for those who wish to learn about work being done in the field.

4) Doing Peoplehood

While the paper focuses on intellectuals and organizations that are consciously promoting the “Jewish Peoplehood” concept, we end the paper by taking note of an obvious ambiguity. There are many organizations that by their very nature enable Jews from across the ideological spectrum of Jewish life to interact with one another or expose their constituents to the wider Jewish world. Most of these organizations are not using the term “Jewish Peoplehood” to categorize their work, but are in fact “building Jewish Peoplehood”. These organizations include community oriented organizations, educational institutions, organizations that promote partnerships between Jewish organizations and encounters between Jews from different backgrounds and research/policy organizations.

Although a discussion of this sort requires a separate paper, we will outline elements that are common to organizations that “build Jewish peoplehood in practice.”¹ These elements should be considered in a policy discussion aimed at strengthening and shaping the infrastructure needed by organizations who are now organizing their work under the banner of Jewish Peoplehood.

¹ Note we capitalize the word Peoplehood, when using the concept as a proper noun – i.e, specifically referring to the concept of “JewishPeoplehood”. Otherwise, when referring to organizations that build Jewish peoplehood, or the like, it is left as lowercase.

I. A HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

A NEW CONCEPT

The idea of “the Jewish People” is ancient, but the concept of Jewish Peoplehood is new, both to the English and Hebrew languages.

A search of major English language dictionaries conducted by a columnist in the “Jewish Forward” showed that prior to 1961 the word “Peoplehood” did not appear in any of them.² The author shows for example that in the 1969 *American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*, “peoplehood” does not appear, whereas the word does appear in the 1992 edition. There the concept was defined as follows: “Peoplehood: The state or condition of being a people or one of a people: ‘As symbols go, few are as national and sectarian as the menorah. It is the symbol of Jewish peoplehood.’”

The first significant use of the Peoplehood concept that we are aware of was by Mordechai Kaplan (1959). Ami Bouganim (forthcoming) notes that prior to 1954, Kaplan used the term “nationhood” or “civilization” to describe the Jewish collective.

In 1954, however, Kaplan feels the need to qualify the comments he made in 1935. ... Kaplan rejects the concept of nationhood, offering in its place the concept of peoplehood. In the preface to a new edition of his book *Judaism as a Civilization*, he writes: “The concept ‘nationhood,’ as applied to the Jews, has come to be closely identified with statehood, and was, therefore, in need of being replaced by the concept ‘peoplehood’” (Kaplan 1964, p. IX). In a series of articles written after the establishment of the state, Kaplan frequently used the term Jewish peoplehood. (Quoted from Bouganim (forthcoming)).

Like the contemporary intellectual who is interested in the Peoplehood concept, Mordechai Kaplan was searching for a term that would enable him to describe the complex nature of Jewish belonging as he saw it in post WWII America. However, it seems that besides Kaplan there wasn’t any other sustained intellectual focus on the Jewish Peoplehood concept in the United States until after 2000.

Interest among Israelis in the Peoplehood concept is even more recent. In 2003, a group of Israeli educators requested permission from *The Academy of the Hebrew Language*,³ to use the term “*amiut*.” They argued that existing Hebrew concepts, such as “*clal yisrael*,” are too closely tied in to the Jewish religion in the minds of non-religious Israelis. A term is needed

² Hillel Halkin, “‘Peoplehood’ From the Jews?”, in the *Jewish Forward*, June 11, 2004 (<http://www.forward.com/articles/5827/>).

that will capture the idea of belonging to the Jewish Peoplehood in a manner that transcends religion. A representative of the Academy answered our query as follows: “The Academy did not approve the word *Amiut*. The reason for the negative response: Not every English word should occasion the creation of new words when there are already existing words in Hebrew that can be used.”

Only time will tell if a new word to describe Jewish Peoplehood will gain official sanction and/or widespread use in Israel. However, it is clear that prior to 2003 no one felt the need to create a Hebrew word for Jewish Peoplehood, and that there are those who are now pushing for a change. Why now? Why the need among some Jewish organizations and intellectuals for a new concept to describe the sentiment of belonging to the Jewish people? And what is the significance of the interest in the Peoplehood concept in this first decade of the 21st century?

THE DECLINE OF JEWISH IDEOLOGIES

The intensive use by Jewish organizations of the Peoplehood concept and intellectual interest in the topic in almost all cases began no earlier than 2000. At this point in the paper it is enough to note that major organizations such as the United Jewish Communities, the UJA New York Federation, the Jewish Agency for Israel, the Israel Ministry of Education, the Diaspora Museum, the Avi Chai Foundation, the American Jewish Committee and many other smaller organizations are either making the Peoplehood concept into an organizing principle in their organizations or initiating high profile programming with an explicit focus on Jewish Peoplehood – all since 2000.

Why the sudden surge of interest in Jewish Peoplehood?

The thesis we wish to develop here is that the sudden use of the concept of Jewish Peoplehood by Jewish organizations stems from an ideological vacuum that developed in both the United States and Israel⁴ beginning in the 1970s, but whose impact is only now being felt.

By “ideology” we mean “an organized framework for making life meaningful.” “Why is it meaningful to live a Jewish life?” *The answer to this question, when it is organized and propagated by organizations, is always ideological.* The question is which ideology and what

³ The official organization charged by the State of Israel with creating new words for the Hebrew language.

⁴ We are focusing on Israel and the United States as this is where our expertise lies.

are its characteristics? Major Jewish ideologies over the past two hundred years include variants of Zionism, religion, liberal humanism, and socialism among others.

The answers provided to the questions of Jewish meaning by the 19th and 20th century ideological movements no longer capture the imagination of large segments of Jewry. The result is a problem for the leadership of Jewish organizations. Whether for fundraising, communal, educational or political work, organizations must provide a convincing rationale for their actions or over time they will lose members and resources. Within this reality, the idea of Jewish Peoplehood is seen as a possible avenue for organizations to reach out to their constituents.

JEWISH BELONGING IS NO LONGER OBVIOUS

Jewish emancipation marks the entrance of Jews into the modern era and is a necessary reference point for understanding the significance of the current use of the “Jewish Peoplehood” concept. Emancipation refers to the granting of citizenship rights to Jews – a process that began at the end of the 18th century in France and then spread across Europe over the course of the 19th century.

The granting of citizenship rights gave Jews the opportunity to leave the organized Jewish community (*the kehilla*) and create alternative communal frameworks or simply leave Jewish life all together. Most importantly, emancipation created the need for all Jews to ask questions like, “Why is it meaningful to live a Jewish life?” “Why should I remain part of a Jewish community?” Prior to emancipation, most Jews did not think to ask these questions, as the State mandated their membership in a Jewish community. Only with the “right to leave” does a Jew need to ask: “Why should I stay?”

Emancipation brought a shift in the categories used by Jews to describe one another. Previously, Jewish belonging was organized by geography (e.g., Litvak vs. Galician). In the post-emancipation era, Jews began using labels like “Zionist,” “Socialist,” and “Religious” and variants within each category to describe themselves and others. Each of these labels drew on an ideological framework for answering the question: “Why is it meaningful to continue to live a Jewish life?”

Despite the need to ask “why be a Jew”, for those who opted to remain within the Jewish community the ideological frameworks provided by the various movements continued to provide compelling answers through the 1960s. Regardless of differences between the ideological movements, their adherents took it for granted that they had a compelling

answer to the question of why they should continue to belong to the Jewish People. Jewish organizations could raise funds or recruit members based on the claim that they offer the best way to live and nurture Jewish life and the good of the Jewish People. Jewish Peoplehood was a taken for granted state of belonging to the Jewish People.

Major social changes played out over the second half of the 20th century which are undermining, or have undermined many of the moderate or centrist Jewish ideological movements. The nature of these changes are beyond the scope of this paper⁵ but the end result is the same – large numbers of Jews are no longer strongly attached to meaningful Jewish ideologies. Many are adopting what the sociologist Herbert Gans called “symbolic ethnicity” - a shallow form of belonging that relies on ethnic food and occasional participation in collective ceremonies as the primary markers of Jewish life.⁶ Others are looking for serious alternatives, often finding them in either the extremist sectarian ideologies of the Orthodox right that reject the idea that Jews can embrace modern life and remain fully Jewish, or in assimilatory ideologies produced by the Jewish left.

Despite the decline of centrist Jewish ideology, the vast majority of active and identifying Jews remain in the middle – they embrace life as full citizens of their respective societies and at the same time desire a compelling answer to the question “Why be a Jew?,” if only to answer their children’s questions.

Jewish Peoplehood, we propose, is an attempt by the leadership of the major Jewish organizations and movements in the center of the Jewish socio-political and religious spectrum to respond to the loss of a compelling “middle of the road” ideological vision. Jewish leaders want to provide compelling answers to their constituents about issues of Jewish belonging, and they are looking to the Peoplehood concept as one possibility.

A CENTRIST AND ASHKENAZI CONCEPT

Where there is certainty about the meaning of Jewish life, the concept of Jewish Peoplehood is not used as an organizing concept. It is rare to find traditionalist Jews of African/Asian descent, right-wing Orthodox or Haredim, or Jews who hold strong universalistic/humanistic ideologies participating in the forums being convened to discuss

⁵ For an overview of 20th century changes in American and Israeli society and their impact on Jewish identity and belonging see Kopelowitz (2005).

⁶ See Gans (1979, 1994).

the Peoplehood concept. Jews from these backgrounds are also rare among the leadership of the organizations that are now promoting Jewish Peoplehood.

Jews of African/Asian descent are normally “traditionalist” in orientation – they practice a form of Judaism that is community and family oriented and includes within it a strong identification with the global Jewish community. Albeit with major changes taking place in recent times (e.g. the rise of Shas in Israel), these Jews tend to resist strong religious or secular ideologies. They have little expressed need to consciously voice and elaborate their connection to the Jewish People – the connection is obvious.

For Jews on the right of the religious Jewish spectrum, Jewish Peoplehood is still an obvious concept that is embedded within their everyday life. Strong orthodox ideologies allow individuals to grapple with the questions of Jewish meaning and belonging without the need to open up the question of Peoplehood for debate and examination. For those on the far left of the Jewish ideological spectrum, the orientation is towards the non-Jewish world and Peoplehood is not an issue of great interest.

Jewish leaders who are now adopting the Peoplehood concept are of a particular type. They are almost all Ashkenazi Jews raised within the mainstream 20th century socio-political and religious movements of American and Israeli Jewish society. Those Israeli Jews who use the concept are the children of the Secular-Zionist or moderate Religious-Zionist political movements. The American Jews who are embracing Peoplehood grew up within the Reform, Conservative and liberal Orthodox denominations. In all cases, they grew up within ideological frameworks which they personally feel no longer offer convincing models for them and/or their constituents and they are embracing Jewish Peoplehood.

Little research exists on this topic, thus our basis for the observations made here rests on personal experience – direct involvement with many of the organized initiatives and friendships and professional acquaintances with people involved in Peoplehood initiatives. One piece of research that backs up our claim is Yehuda Bar Shalom’s (2003) evaluation of “Jewish Peoplehood educational programs” at teachers training colleges in Israel. Bar Shalom found that the Israelis creating Peoplehood programs are second or third generation Ashkenazi Israelis. They experienced an epiphany after traveling in the Jewish Diaspora and having meaningful social encounters with Diaspora Jews. As a result of “the meeting” with the Jewish Diaspora they began to question the ideological framework offered by classic Zionism with which they were raised and embraced the Peoplehood concept as an alternative model for action.

A similar picture emerges when we look at the intellectuals who are writing about Jewish Peoplehood. With the exception of two of the authors we cover in the next section - Ami Bouganim and Shmuel Trigano - the others are of European/Ashkenazi descent and grew up within the mainstream socio-political and religious movements of American and Israeli Jewish society.

We offer this insight not to disparage the Peoplehood concept. The opposite is the case - the concept gives us insight into the intensive search taking place amongst Ashkenazi Jewish moderates for a meaningful and vibrant framework for the organization of Jewish life in the 21st century. Hence the importance of an analysis of the Peoplehood concept as it is currently being developed by Jewish organizations and intellectuals. The concept provides a looking glass into critical issues that the leadership of Ashkenazi Jewry is grappling with at the turn of the 21st century.

II. A GUIDE TO CURRENT INTELLECTUAL THOUGHT ABOUT JEWISH PEOPLEHOOD

As we stated above, the Peoplehood concept is a new organizing concept for Jewish organizations. From the perspective of organizational development, organizations must develop a theory of action about Jewish Peoplehood if they are to create strategic plans and develop programs in a way that enables a clear standard for distinguishing success from failure. For this to happen, an intellectual discussion about the nature of “Jewish Peoplehood” is essential.

This section lays out several schools of thought about the Jewish Peoplehood concept. Each offers a different way of understanding Jewish Peoplehood. We don't propose to favor one approach or the other. An organization might choose to take elements from different schools of thought or adopt a particular approach. However, it is vital that an organization that wishes to use the Jewish Peoplehood concept define its goals vis-à-vis a coherent intellectual statement of what its leadership thinks Peoplehood is about.

WHAT IS JEWISH PEOPLEHOOD? PRINCIPLES ON WHICH THERE IS AGREEMENT

Before detailing different schools of thought, we will look at the principles that intellectuals writing on the topic share with one another. The areas of agreement enable us to delineate that which is intellectually unique about the Peoplehood concept both in terms of what Peoplehood is and what it is not.

The areas of agreement between Jewish intellectuals writing about the concept of Jewish Peoplehood point to three principles. Taken together these three principles provide the intellectual depth and coherency needed to turn Peoplehood into an actionable concept.

1. **A multi-dimensional experience** – The concept of Jewish Peoplehood assumes an understanding of Jewish belonging that is multidimensional.
2. **Rejection of strong ideology** - Strong ideological frameworks that over emphasize one dimension of the larger Jewish experience are not an acceptable starting point for understanding how individuals connect to the Jewish People.
3. **Connections between Jews, not Jewish identity** - Those concerned with the Jewish Peoplehood concept do not focus on the identity of individuals, but rather on the nature of connections between Jews. The concern is with common elements and

frameworks that enable Jews to connect with one another both emotionally and socially.

In combination, these three principles imbue the Peoplehood concept with intellectual coherence and we believe offer an added value to organizations that wish to create programs “that build Jewish peoplehood” in a sustainable and measurable way. In this section we explore each of these three agreed upon principals of Jewish Peoplehood and then look at areas in which intellectuals disagree.

JEWISH PEOPLEHOOD IS A MULTIDIMENSIONAL CONCEPT

There is general agreement that any theoretical discussion about the Jewish Peoplehood concept must be multi-dimensional. By “multi-dimensional” the authors refer to the complex nature of Jewish identity and their desire to embrace and even celebrate this complexity as the key to understanding the basis of belonging to the Jewish People.

Arnold Eisen (forthcoming), in his introduction to a forthcoming collection of essays on Jewish Peoplehood, eloquently presents the connection between the complex nature of Jewish belonging and “Peoplehood”.

“Peoplehood” – appears to the contributors to this collection, and to me, the concept best suited by far to answer (or at least cope with) the quandary of Jewish identity. Indeed, it is probably the only concept that meets present needs on the score and suits the present situation. “Nation” and “religion” are each in their own way “too big.” They demand more than many Jews are willing to give in terms of belief or behavior and thus leave those Jews outsiders to a group which they know belongs to them and which they want very much to claim as their own. Ethnicity and heritage are “too small.” They miss out on a lot of what makes Jewish identity attractive and even compelling to many Jews -- a part of the self for which they are profoundly grateful and that many are profoundly disappointed not to pass on. Only “peoplehood” seems “just right.” It betokens an identity in which “religious” as well as “secular” Jews, Israeli as well as Diaspora Jews, can feel at home.

David Mittelberg (2006) and Michael Walzer (forthcoming) argue that the Jewish People includes within itself religious and nationalist components but cannot be reduced to either religion or nationalism. Mittelberg argues that it is better to think of the Jews as a civilization that includes many dimensions of religion, culture and nation. Mittelberg fears the increasing emphasis on the religious component among American Jews, and the emphasis Israeli Jews place on the nationalist dimension. The result, he argues, is the increasing separation of the two largest parts of the Jewish People.

Moshe Halbertal (forthcoming) points to three conceptions of Jewish identity which have emerged in modern times: the covenantal (religious) identity, the national identity, and the cosmopolitan identity. He argues that as analytical concepts these alternatives are incommensurable, yet many modern Jews do not reside in purity in either of them - the plurality resides in their own soul. He opposes projects such as Rav Kook's that attempt to explain one identity in terms of the other (for example explaining that secular identity is a necessary stage in the saga leading to redemption). Each identity should be respected on its own terms. The modern Jew is a complex hybrid and it would be wise to recognize and respect this plurality as it is. Likewise, Walzer argues that Jews should not attempt to escape their multi-faceted nature in order to live up to other peoples' conceptions of them and be like others. Rather, their neighbors' should learn to live with the complex identities that Jews bring with them.

REJECTION OF STRONG IDEOLOGIES

The flip side of embracing complexity is the rejection of strong ideologies. The rejection of a strong Jewish ideology is an extremely important point and must be understood if one is to appreciate the contribution of the "Jewish Peoplehood" concept. The intellectuals writing on the topic of Jewish Peoplehood feel that strong ideology often leads to an overemphasis of one aspect of the Jewish experience or another.

There are many intellectuals, religious and Zionist, who talk about their commitment to "the Jewish People" but are not promoting "Jewish Peoplehood" in the sense used by the contemporary supporters of the concept. The authors writing about Peoplehood are all uncomfortable with the claims of religious or Zionist ideologues that there is a particular approach to Jewish life that holds the answer to Jewish continuity. None of the Peoplehood authors wishes to privilege one aspect or another of Jewish religiosity or nationalism. Rather, in the Peoplehood world view the only given is that there are Jewish individuals who want to connect to the Jewish People. The questions are: (1) How do Jews succeed in sustaining a sense of belonging to the Jewish People in contemporary times? And, (2) do Jewish organizations facilitate this connection in a manner that also recognizes the complex nature of Jewish belonging?

CONNECTIONS BETWEEN JEWS

A discussion about the Jewish Peoplehood concept always begins with a focus on the nature of the connection between individual Jews and not about choices individual Jews

make or Jewish identity. In her PhD dissertation, Minna Wolf elaborates on the idea that Peoplehood is about the group dimension.

The idea of modern Jewish belonging or peoplehood relates to several key concepts. First, it is connected to familism, an element of Jewish collective consciousness describing “the tendency of Jews to see themselves as part of an extended family” (Liebman and Cohen 1990: 17). Familism incorporates mutual responsibility, obligation, and permanence, along with a sense of caring about other Jews. Second, peoplehood relates to the concept of transcendent belonging, “a feeling of deep connection to previous generations and future generations as well as to Jews of today who are scattered around the globe” (Cohen and Eisen 2000: 114). And finally, it is connected to what Cohen (2003) refers to as mythic collective narrative.

Wolf’s focus and that of the other Peoplehood authors is the Jewish group. This is a major step away from the concern with the individual Jews, their lifestyle choices and Jewish identities, which has dominated discussion, debate and research about contemporary Jewish belonging over the past 50 years.

The following example taken from an on-line debate on the website, [jewcy.com](http://www.jewcy.com), helps illustrate the significance of the difference between a focus on individual identity as opposed to the Jewish collective. The debate is between Prof. Jack Wertheimer, representing the Peoplehood position and Joey Kurtzman, who takes what we call the “Jewish identity” position. Wertheimer focuses on issues that threaten the group, such as intermarriage. Kurtzman and his supporter in the quote below are concerned with the identity of individuals.

“Dr. Wertheimer isn't wrong about the threats posed by intermarriage and ‘syncretism’ But I simply cannot accept his solution. I take very seriously my Jewish heritage. The Holocaust and my familial connection to it has deeply impacted my politics and values - first and foremost my rejection of tribalism and ethnocentrism! I do not think we can go backward into a tribal world. I think it is wrong. I don't want to have to choose between my Jewish identity and my deeply held values of tolerance, cosmopolitanism, existentialism, identity-creation, and universalism. But if I had to choose, as much as it pains me to say it, I would have to choose my values over my heritage.”⁷

Note the emphasis of the writer on “*my* Jewish identity.” Jewish identity here is taken to its logical extreme. The Jewish individual is conceptualized as an autonomous agent who picks and chooses elements of Jewish culture which are personally meaningful. In its more

⁷ Answer posted by a reader on Jun 11, 2007. <http://www.jewcy.com/dialogue/2007-06-11/wertheimer1>

moderate form, identity is about “my” connection to a particular group or movement. For example, Reform identity is about an individual’s connection to the Reform movement.

Either in its radical individualist or moderate forms, identity is about the choices individuals make to shape a meaningful Jewish lifestyle. In contrast, the authors writing about Jewish Peoplehood do not focus on individual choice, but rather on those elements of Jewish culture and institutional life that enable Jewish individuals to connect to one another, should they choose to do so. The group and not the individual, serve as the analytical starting point.

DIVERGENT SCHOOLS OF THOUGHT

Beyond the three areas of agreement described above, there are divergent schools of thought among intellectuals writing on Jewish Peoplehood. The primary division between these schools is similar to the “communitarian” and “liberal” divide that exists in the wider debate about the nature of citizenship, community and belonging in contemporary society.⁸ Communitarians tend to look for the common resources and obligations that people draw on when they join a community or are members of a society. In contrast, liberals do not focus on what people have in common with one another. Rather, liberals concern themselves with the challenge of maintaining public frameworks that will at once allow for social order, but at the same time for cultural diversity in the face of pressures to assimilate in multi-cultural societies. The liberal wants to understand how it is possible to create a common sense of belonging that doesn’t demand the assimilation of different social groups to a single cultural model.

We should note that the two positions are not exclusive of one another - many authors reference both the common content as well as the pluralism upon which Jewish Peoplehood builds. In the coming pages we associate authors with the position that they most strongly emphasize in the pieces we read while writing this paper.

THE COMMUNITARIAN POSITION - THE COMMON FABRIC OF JEWISH PEOPLEHOOD

There are several variants of the communitarian position among intellectuals writing about Jewish Peoplehood. The common denominator is the desire to find common ground upon which connections between Jews are built. We discern four distinct positions: (1)

⁸ See for example see Mulhall and Swift (1996)

Peoplehood as shared mission with an emphasis on shared destiny; (2) Peoplehood as shared mission with an emphasis on Tikkun Olam; (3) Peoplehood as shared kinship and mutual responsibility and; (4) Peoplehood as obligation.

Peoplehood as Shared Mission 1: Shared Covenant/Destiny

Michael Rosenak (forthcoming) argues that Peoplehood is the common ground among Jews which may be either *descriptive* (of reality as it is) or *prescriptive* (of what we hope reality to be). The idea of a Peoplehood as descriptive as opposed to prescriptive builds directly on Rabbi Soloveichik's concepts of a *covenant of fate* and *covenant of destiny*. As long as there is anti-Semitism there will be a covenant of fate among persecuted Jews. But this is a cheerless prospect. If we are to attract Jews who live in the West in the best of conditions we must develop a covenant of destiny as well. It is not enough to rely on the social factors that enable Jewish Peoplehood - we must also offer a prescriptive call for action. Basing himself upon the teachings of Eliezer Goldman and Martin Buber, Rosenak calls for the development of a "uniquely Jewish spiritual life." Goldman sees this in Orthodox terms as demanding a commitment to Halacha; Buber supports a more open ended spiritual quest based upon "the religious experience of this moment, rooted in 'the life of the nation'."

Peoplehood as Shared Mission 2: Tikkun Olam

When Rosenak, an Orthodox Jew, speaks of shared mission, he is addressing other Jews without a significant focus on the non-Jewish world. This is typically the case when Jews of Orthodox or Conservative religious backgrounds address the shared mission of the Jewish People. In contrast, liberal Reform and secular Jews often push a conception of Jewish Peoplehood that calls for Tikkun Olam. The term has been used for many years without connection to the concept of Jewish Peoplehood, but is now being integrated into the Peoplehood discussion.

The argument is that in open societies, in which Jews are full citizens, Jewish Peoplehood will only be meaningful if the common Jewish mission addresses universal issues of social justice faced by Jews and non-Jews alike. For example, Leonard Fein (2006) in his contribution to *Sh'ma* magazine's 2006 issue devoted to the topic of "Peoplehood and Justice"⁹ calls on congregations to support social justice as a central Jewish value. Yossi Abramowitz, in his rich and diverse writings on the <http://www.peoplehood.org> website is

⁹ http://www.shma.com/oct_06/archive.phtml

a leading proponent of the Tikkun Olam understanding of Jewish Peoplehood. The following is an example of Abramowitz's world view.

"We have been a global people for 2,000 years. At a time when the international institutions formed after World War II are lacking in the ethical framework to deal with a new and more complex age, the Jewish people have some things to say, teach, model."¹⁰

Peoplehood as Shared Kinship and Mutual Responsibility

Part of Rosenak's argument cited above is that Peoplehood is produced by shared experience and must also include a shared destiny. Like Rosenak, Steven M. Cohen (2003) and Steven M. Cohen and Jack Wertheimer (2006) also regard shared experience as one half of the Peoplehood equation, but use the analytical lens of social science to interpret the philosophical idea of shared destiny as "mutual responsibility." Shared experience produces a sense of kinship and a common descent and history.

Among its [Jewish Peoplehood] key elements are: a sense of kinship and common descent, an interlinked history, shared threats, and ultimately a shared destiny. Correlatively, Jews have also believed that they resemble one another in key aspects of culture and personality, as well as sharing common values, circumstances, and interests. They could easily say to one another, 'We are alike, and different from others. We hold similar beliefs and ideas, we share the same sorts of opportunities and challenges, we have been subject to the same threats, experienced the same possibilities, and feel as if we are a large extended family with a great sense of mutual obligation' (Cohen 2003: 1)

In this school of thought, shared experience and mutual obligation feed off of one another. While shared experience and mutual obligation don't have to go hand in hand with one another, there is an assumption in Cohen and Wertheimer's writing that if shared Jewish experiences drop, so the feeling of shared kinship and mutual obligation between Jews will decline.

Cohen and Wertheimer argue that throughout Jewish history Jews were propelled to action by the common kinship they felt with other Jews. They feel that the last example of this type of mass Jewish action on behalf of other Jews was the demonstration for Soviet Jewry that brought over a quarter million Americans to Washington DC and other activity on behalf of Soviet Jews in the 1980s. Cohen and Wertheimer argue that today, American Jews are giving less to causes that are specifically Jewish. The fraying of bonds has to do with

¹⁰ <http://www.peoplehood.org/?m=200602>

the dissolution of the common Jewish experience in the openness of American society and the feeling of full citizenship and security that American Jews feel. The results are high rates of intermarriage and high numbers of non-Jewish friends, with less of a desire to search out and create social relationships with other Jews.

A variation of the “shared experience thesis” is provided by Riv-Ellen Prell (forthcoming) who argues that Peoplehood builds on a sense of a shared past. The problem is that nowadays Jews who do connect to Judaism often do so on their own terms in a very individualistic manner and with a weak sense of a common past. The project of Peoplehood must go against the cultural grain in that it should demand commitment to the collective even when it “takes forms that differ from one’s own practice or world view.” Jews must be able, within the umbrella of Peoplehood, to find a common vocabulary and shared symbols. At the same time it requires a commitment to pluralism (the liberal concern). It may not include all Jews, but many types of Jews should be included. A way to promote this common commitment is by nurturing a sense of a common Jewish past.

Peoplehood Mitzvot/Obligations

Wertheimer, Cohen and Prell’s argument that Jewish Peoplehood is built on a sense of common experience (past and present) and a mutual commitment between Jews, is taken one step further by Alan Hoffman (2006) and Anat Wilff (2005). These two authors feel that Jewish Peoplehood is an organizing platform that is equivalent to religion, to the point that they argue that there is a need for “the mitzvot of Jewish Peoplehood.” The mutual commitment described by Cohen and Wertheimer becomes an obligation or mitzvah. Hoffman (2006) writes:

Michael Rosenak has pointed out that the notion of Peoplehood can be both descriptive and prescriptive. Descriptively, it helps us understand the differences and commonalities among Jews. But Jewish Peoplehood, in order to have a more robust existence, has to move from being descriptive to being prescriptive. What are the minimal conditions of being an active member of this people? What contents, acts, or behaviors create the commonalities that give Jewish Peoplehood an active rather than passive meaning? ... Only when we grapple with the prescriptive aspects of Jewish Peoplehood — what are the 'mitzvot' of Jewish Peoplehood? — will we give this notion both body and weight.

In summation we see among communitarians a search for the common elements of the Jewish experience. The difference between them rests on the degree of emphasis placed on the “prescriptive” dimension. A central question within the debate between Jewish

communitarians is: To what degree do we need a common mission? And, do we need to go as far as formulating “the mitzvot” of Jewish Peoplehood?

THE LIBERAL POSITION – INCORPORATING JEWISH PLURALISM INTO A COMMON PUBLIC FRAMEWORK

In contrast to the communitarians with their emphasis on the need to define the common content that Jews share and which enables Jewish Peoplehood, “liberals” focus the public frameworks or the “form” in which Jews are able to connect to one another. At the heart of the liberal position is the ideal of “conversation” – the ability of Jews of different types to meet and talk with one another. What they talk about is less important than the act of conversation. We call this “the Peoplehood as Conversation” position. A more developed version of this position we refer to below as the idea coined by Shlomi Ravid (unpublished) - “Peoplehood Capital.”

Peoplehood as Conversation

A common element among the authors taking a liberal position is the stress on incorporating Jewish diversity by enabling a conversation between different types of Jews. For example, Arnold Eisen (forthcoming) agrees with Moshe Halbertal (forthcoming) and Michael Walzer (forthcoming) that striving for a common Jewish “destiny” (as suggested in the writings of Y. B. Soloveitchik) and by Rosenak (forthcoming) would be a mistake. Rather he endorses the idea that conversation and not education is the answer. Rather than focusing on what Jews should learn, we are better off promoting frameworks that will enable Jewish conversation and sociability.

Eisen’s rejection of the argument, that building Peoplehood can begin with a focus on common cultural knowledge or mission, is a common theme pursued by the liberal authors. The liberal position worries about the focus on that which is common, as it drags one into the need to determine boundaries and to decide on whose version of common Jewish culture or mission will determine the criteria for the “legitimate” basis of Jewish Peoplehood. Rather, liberals argue that the common elements of Jewish culture are contextual and will be selected by those who are involved in a given conversation.

Laura Geller (forthcoming), a Reform Rabbi, wants to promote “Jewish conversations” among her constituents. Her concern is with the spiritualistic, privatized Judaism promoted by liberal Jews that does not make a conscious attempt to connect individuals to the Jewish collective. In particular, she contends that American Jewry is forgetting “Israel” in the triangle of Torah, God, and Israel that comprised the classic understanding of

Judaism. For the idea of Peoplehood to make sense to this generation it must be framed in terms of "being in a relationship". That can be done by taking concepts from Jewish collective history and applying them to personal needs. For example the redemption from Egypt can be likened to personal redemption from anything from stress to addiction. What is important is that the people share a story and are part of an ongoing conversation with the Jewish sources. The first step is to engage Jews in the conversation. The second step is to "lift up the dimensions of Peoplehood that deepen the conversation around Torah" and "it must be made more transparent that Torah study is not just about personal growth... but about being connected to a community of other people who also study Torah".

Note that Geller is balancing communitarian and liberal positions. Her emphasis is on the importance of a conversation between Jews and she suggests Torah as an important common resource for deepening the Jewish conversation.

Peoplehood as Social Capital

Shlomi Ravid (unpublished), Ezra Kopelowitz (forthcoming, 2006a) and a group of academics and educators at Oranim College in Israel (Dror-Bender and Tzafoni 2006, Wolfen 2006, Mittelberg 1999, 2006, Shmidt 2006) elaborate on the idea of Peoplehood as conversation by focusing on the concept of "social capital". Social capital speaks to the knowledge, resources and institutions that enable individuals to connect with others to create and maintain community.

Like Eisen, both Kopelowitz and Ravid argue that it is unproductive to begin by defining the common content of Peoplehood. We don't need to define the content of Jewish Peoplehood ahead of time in order to understand how to build Jewish Peoplehood. Note that these authors are not rejecting the importance of a "common heritage, values and future goals," but argue that those are only relevant within the context of particular conversations. The people involved in a given conversation will imbue it with the shared Jewish content that they find meaningful.

Initial work is underway to develop a theory of Jewish social capital. Kopelowitz (forthcoming) develops a theory that describes Jewish social capital in terms of the rituals, ceremonies, institutions and communities, which he argues are the building blocks of Jewish Peoplehood. The group at Oranim College in Israel is doing extensive work on developing the idea of Jewish social capital from the perspective of "community building." They focus on institutions of a local community that enable Jews to interact with one another as well as the global Jewish community, in which meetings between Jews from

different countries plays a central role. For example, Ruti Drori-Bender and Guy Tzfoli (2006) and Mittelberg (2007) write about the “glocalization” of Jewish Peoplehood, by which they mean the simultaneous experience of local and global Jewish community that they argue is enhanced by the technology revolution that is part of post-modern society.

WHERE IS THE EMPHASIS, ON FORM OR CONTENT?

In summation, the difference between the communitarian and liberal schools of Jewish Peoplehood is one of emphasis on either the content or form of Jewish collective belonging. It is clear to us, that one cannot build Jewish Peoplehood without creating a framework that will enable Jews to connect with one another (the form). However, the Jewish public frameworks which concern liberals must at the same time have content in order to be meaningful.

No one who takes a Peoplehood position will reject form for content, or vice-versa. Rather, the question is how much emphasis do scholars and practitioners place on the form or content of Jewish collective life. Where do they begin the quest for building and sustaining Jewish Peoplehood in contemporary times?

The strong liberal will focus on creating connections between Jews and will let the participants select the content needed to make the conversation happen. The content of the Jewish conversation is a secondary concern. In contrast, for the strong communitarian, the content of the Jewish conversation is the goal. The strong communitarian seeks out the “Jewish mission” around which the conversation between Jews is created. In all cases, we have found that both the liberals and the communitarians who are interested in the concept of Jewish Peoplehood agree on: (1) the multi-dimensional and complex nature of Jewish belonging; (2) a rejection of strong ideologies, and; (3) an emphasis on connecting Jews, rather than a focus on individual Jewish identity.

III. FROM THEORY TO PRACTICE

In the previous section we learned how intellectuals understand the Peoplehood concept. We learned that there are areas of agreement about the unique aspects of the concept, and at least two major schools of thought with variants within each. In this section we focus on the organizational dimension and the unfortunate divide that currently exists between intellectual discussion and organizational practice.

We begin by looking at the organizations currently using Jewish Peoplehood as an organizing concept. We want to understand if organizations are using Jewish Peoplehood in a manner that develops an applied theory of Jewish Peoplehood and adds unique added value to work they are doing. Does the claim of a strategic focus on “Jewish Peoplehood” go beyond a title given to a particular project or committee and actually impact the day to day work of the organization in a discernable and measurable fashion? Unfortunately, we will only address these questions in a superficial way, and not go into depth. Future research should look into where on the spectrum of liberal and communitarian understandings of Jewish Peoplehood do organizations fall and how that impacts strategic planning and program development. This task requires additional research as well as more pages than this one paper allows.

ORGANIZATIONS IMPLEMENTING THE PEOPLEHOOD CONCEPT

We are aware of initial work being done in the area of Jewish Peoplehood among the organizations listed below. This is not an exhaustive list, but rather one based on our personal knowledge of the field. Further research on the topic is likely to produce a much larger list of organizations. It is important to note that these are organizations that have specifically referenced the “Jewish Peoplehood” concept either at the level of strategic planning or organizational development or in programs that they sponsor.

As we argued above, there is a difference between the broad term “the Jewish People”, which is both an ancient and all-encompassing concept, and “Jewish Peoplehood”, which is a more recent term with a clear set of meanings. Hence, if the term “Jewish Peoplehood” does not appear on an organizations website or other literature that we have access to, the organization does not appear in the list below. That said, we do recognize that many organizations fulfill the criteria of “building Jewish Peoplehood” even though they don’t use the term to describe their work. We address this issue in the final section of the paper.

EDUCATION

- Focus on schools
 - Israel Ministry of Education¹¹
 - RAVSAK – The Jewish Community Day School Network¹²
 - The Diaspora Museum and the Museum's, International School for Jewish Peoplehood studies.¹³
 - Teacher training colleges and institutes in Israel¹⁴
 - Yaacov Herzog Center for Jewish Studies¹⁵
 - Oranim College¹⁶
 - Levinsky College
- Organizations dedicated to bringing Jews of different types together for the purpose of networking, learning or undertaking volunteer projects.
 - Kolot – Bavli-Yerushalmi¹⁷
 - Hillel International¹⁸
 - birthright Israel¹⁹
 - MASA²⁰
 - Kol Dor²¹

LARGE JEWISH COMMUNAL ORGANIZATIONS

- UJA New York Federation - Peoplehood Commission²²
- Combined Jewish Philanthropies – Boston Federation²³

¹¹ From approximately 2001 through 2004, the Unit for Israel-Diaspora relations of the Ministry of Education was the most active player in the development of "Jewish Peoplehood education" in Israel. Unfortunately, due to internal reorganization and Ministry politics the unit's budget was drastically cut and its activity is now largely symbolic. See:

<http://cms.education.gov.il/educationcms/units/jewishpeople/includes/index.html>

¹² Network organization serving 120 community day schools in North America. See: <http://www.ravsak.org/about.php>.

¹³ See: <http://www.bh.org.il/school/index.aspx>

¹⁴ For an overview of early work done by these colleges see Bar Shalom (2003). The colleges worked on the topic of Jewish Peoplehood as part of a collaborative program funded by the UJA New York Federation and the Jewish Agency for Israel called Gvanim. The work of the project was documented by the partners and edited as a summary document by Dr. Moshe Yitzhaki of Oranim College.

¹⁵ See: <http://www.merkazherzog.org.il/english/welcome.htm?page=http://www.merkazherzog.org.il/english/staff.htm>

¹⁶ See: <http://www.oranim.ac.il/site/heb/General.aspx?l=4&id=3412>

¹⁷ See: http://www.kolot.info/english/programs/bavli_yerushalmi/our_mission/

¹⁸ See the use of the word Peoplehood in the Hillel International mission statement: <http://www.hillel.org/about/default>.

¹⁹ The term Peoplehood does not appear on the birthright Israel website, but research done on birthright by the Cohen Center at Brandeis University indicates that Peoplehood is an organizing concept for birthright. See for example: Saxe, Sasson and Hecht (2006) report titled: "Taglit-birthright Israel: Impact on Jewish Identity, Peoplehood, and Connection to Israel." The report can be downloaded at: <http://www.brandeis.edu/cmjs/Publication.cfm?IDResearch=119>.

²⁰ For the use of the term Jewish Peoplehood in their mission statement see:

<http://www.masaisrael.org/Masa/English/About+MASA/Our+Mission/MASA+an+overview.htm>

²¹ See: <http://www.koldor.org/inb.php?ct=cor&tm=Overview>. Kol Dor is an organization focused on social networking between Jewish activists. The organization sponsors a newsletter that disseminates news and information on the topic of Jewish Peoplehood.

²² One of the three lay driven commissions of the UJA New York Federation charged with creating and implementing the organization's funding policy. The Federation, by way of its Peoplehood Commission, is in the initial stages of preparing a major research project examining the manner in which Jewish Peoplehood is developed in different countries and communities. The project is co-sponsored by the Israel Department of the Jewish Agency. The goal of the project to help the UJA New York Federation and the Jewish Agency develop a strategic plan in the area of Jewish Peoplehood. Over the past two years the Peoplehood commission has undertaken a series of consultations with researchers and academics on the topic of Peoplehood and is slowly developing an applied theory to guide their work. In general, funding from the UJA New York Federation has been a major component in many of the programs in Israel that are consciously attempting to build Jewish Peoplehood.

- United Jewish Communities²⁴
- The Jewish Agency²⁵

FOUNDATIONS

- Nadav Foundation²⁶
- Avi Chai Foundation²⁷
- Wexner Heritage Foundation²⁸
- Jewish Funders Network²⁹
- Jewish Policy Organizations
- American Jewish Committee³⁰

A LACK OF SYSTEMATIC PLANNING

Are organizations listed above developing a coherent approach to the topic? Unfortunately, the answer in almost all cases is negative. We saw in the previous section that a reading of the literature does enable us to delineate the key elements of a theory of Jewish Peoplehood. However, with some isolated exceptions, which we will discuss below, few organizations are systematically working to connect the insights produced by the intellectual discourse on Jewish Peoplehood to the world of organizational practice.

Our impression is that many of the organizations use the Peoplehood concept as a marketing concept that does not impact the day to day work of the organization in a serious way. Usually the term “Jewish Peoplehood” is added as a description to programming areas that the organization does anyway. In most cases these programming areas involve bringing Jews of different backgrounds together for *mifgashim* (organized encounters) or involve travel to Israel. However, beyond the initial recognition that this

²³ The Boston Federation is involved with many community building projects in the Boston area and between Boston and Israel. These projects exemplify the approach to Peoplehood that we labeled above as focused on creating connections between Jews. Most notable is the Boston-Haifa partnership. While most of this work is not organized under the banner of Peoplehood, some of the programs are. See for example the school to school program called: "Making Personal Connections:

Temple Beth El, Sudbury/ Hugim High School: at <http://www.cjp.org/page.html?ArticleID=137544>.

²⁴ The UJC recently decided in 2007/2008 to dissolve its Renaissance and Renewal Pillar and create a Jewish Peoplehood and Identity Group that will organize a major part of its work. See: <http://www.ujc.org/page.html?ArticleID=147064>

²⁵ The Jewish Agency has several programming areas that use Peoplehood as an organizing principle. See for example, “The Jewish Peoplehood Shabbaton.”

<http://www.60israel.org/JewishAgency/English/Jewish+Education/Focus+Areas/60Israel/The+Jewish+Peoplehood+Shabbaton.htm>

²⁶ Major funder of the Diaspora Museum and its International School for Jewish Peoplehood studies. The Fund commissioned the writing of this paper.

²⁷ See: <http://www.avichai.org/bin/en.jsp?enPage=BlankPage&enDisplay=view&enDispWhat=Zone&enZone=PJPI>

²⁸ The Wexner Heritage Foundation’s 2005 Alumni conference was organized around the topic of Jewish Peoplehood. We don’t know if the foundation has undertaken any additional work in this area.

²⁹ The Jewish Funders Network has marked the topic of Jewish Peoplehood as a possible area on which funders might collaborate with one another. See: <http://www.jfunders.org/knowledgecenter/giving-in-america-from-the-atlanta-jewish-times>.

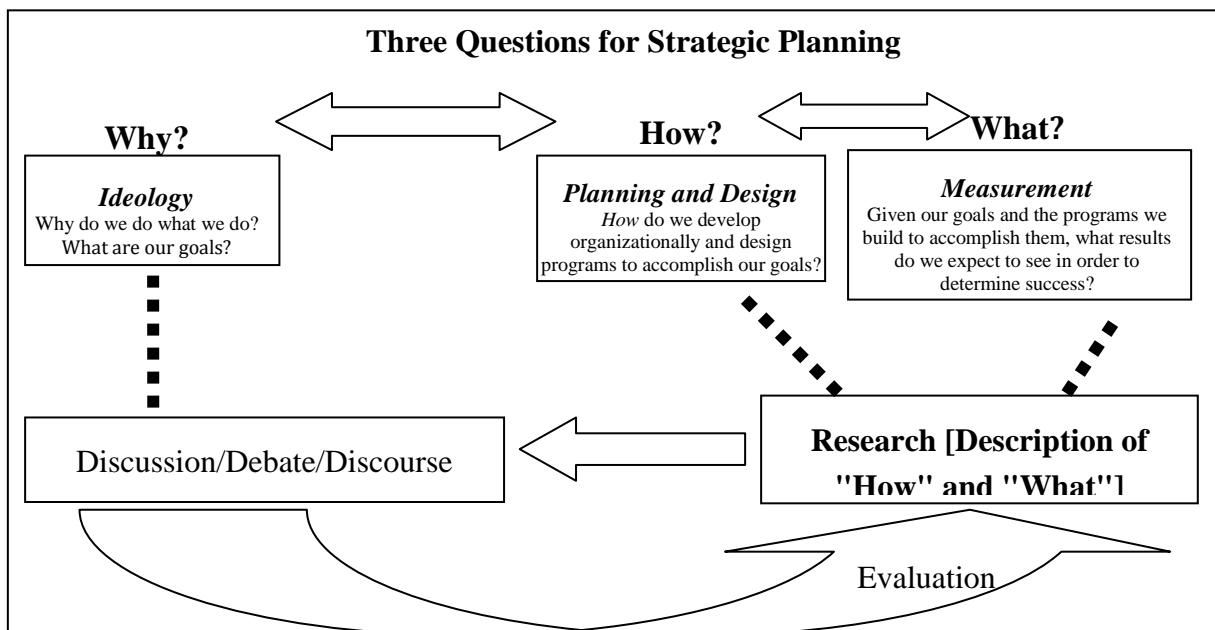
³⁰ The American Jewish Committee organizes some of its work on Israel-Diaspora relations under the banner of Jewish Peoplehood. <http://www.aic.org/site/apps/nl/content3.asp?c=ijTI2PHKoG&b=839827&ct=1044559>

type of programming is indeed appropriate for an organization that wants to build Jewish Peoplehood, the actual planning and implementation of the program is not done in any systematic way that speaks of a coherent agenda.

We should add a caveat that for the most part the above statement about the lack of systematic Peoplehood planning in different Jewish organizations is based upon informal knowledge. We are drawing on work we have done with some of the organizations in the list above, conversations with friends and colleagues who work at the organizations and other forms of informal feedback received over the years. A research project that examines the development of Jewish Peoplehood policy and programming in different organizations, which will provide more substance to the above claims is very much in need. The initial work that does exist is detailed below.

EXAMPLES OF SYSTEMATIC ATTEMPTS TO DEVELOP JEWISH PEOPLEHOOD

A systematic attempt to develop Jewish Peoplehood involves development of an applied theory of Peoplehood that enables answers to three questions: (1) Why?; (2) How? and; (3) What? An organization needs to engage in an ongoing discussion of “why” it wants to pursue Jewish Peoplehood. Out of that discussion will come decisions about “how” the vision is implemented in terms of organizational planning, commitment of resources and content development and “what” results must occur in order to determine success.



The organization that has most fully developed a theory of practice along the lines sketched in the above diagram is Oranim College in Israel. As we cited on page 18 above, there are a group of academics and educators at Oranim who are both developing a theory of Jewish Peoplehood as well as implementing that theory in the context of educational programs. There are two impressive examples, amongst others. The first example is the Yuvalim program, which enables students who are sent by the Jewish Agency to work in North American Jewish Summer camps to take academic and practical courses having to do with the Jewish world and informal education. For the semester prior to traveling to camp, the students devote serious time to learning about the Jewish world and thinking about their place within it. The result is an experience that enriches the individuals both in terms of knowledge and in terms of meetings with other Jews in a carefully thought out process.³¹ A second example is the development of school to school programming with the Combined Jewish Philanthropies (Boston Federation) that helps schools in Israel and the United States work together.³² This project has, from its inception, developed a comprehensive research program which to date includes 20 research reports.

Between 2002 and 2005 a similar combination of research, discourse and practice occurred at the Department of Education of the Jewish Agency. The Department's Research and Evaluation Unit worked with education professionals to develop a theory of Jewish Peoplehood education and "New Zionism". Work included a focus on the experience of the young Israelis who work in American Jewish summer camps (Kopelowitz 2003a, Bram and Neria 2003), the development of Peoplehood training programs at Israeli Teacher Colleges (Bar Shalom 2003), organized *mifgashim* between Israeli and Diaspora Jews (Feldman and Katz 2002), professional training programs (Bram and Engelberg 2003, Kopelowitz and Bar Shalom 2004) and the work of Jewish professionals whose primary concern is the connection of Israel and Diaspora Jewish organizations and communities (Kopelowitz 2006b). This work was accompanied by conferences and departmental seminars devoted to the discussion of educational theory having to do with the decline of classic Zionism, the connection between Jews living in and out of Israel and the place of Jewish Peoplehood as an organizing ideology.

A major outcome of the work done at the Jewish Agency was an international conference held in the summer of 2005, co-sponsored by the UJA Federation of New York, the Jewish Agency and the America-Israel Jewish Committee which brought intellectuals together to

³¹ See: <http://www.ornanim.ac.il/Shner/Yuvalim/default.htm>

³² See: <http://www.cjp.org/page.html?ArticleID=137544>

write about the Jewish Peoplehood concept. The outcome of the conference is an edited collection of essays which is currently being prepared for publication (Kopelowitz and Revivi, forthcoming). Several of these essays are referenced in this paper. The conference and resultant book were meant to serve as a first stage – the mapping of theories of Peoplehood – which would lead to a second stage focused on the translation of the theory into practice, including research into the development of Peoplehood practices in Jewish organizations. Unfortunately, the second stage of the project, along with the rest of the systematic planning work done on Jewish Peoplehood at the Department of Education of the Jewish Agency has for the most part evaporated due to budget cuts.³³

There are other organizations who are currently investing serious resources in and focusing attention on the topic of Peoplehood. Of the major Jewish organizations, we are aware of initial work at creating an applied theory of Jewish Peoplehood at the UJA New York Federation - Peoplehood Commission and the Combined Jewish Philanthropies (Boston Federation). This type of work involves internal discussions, prioritizing grants and some evaluation of programs which leads, over the course of many years, to a developed sense of what the organization wishes to achieve.

Other organizations include Israel based organizations such as the Diaspora Museum and its International School for Jewish Peoplehood Studies, RAVSAK – The Jewish Community Day School Network, Yaacov Herzog Center for Jewish Studies, Kolot and Kol Dor (see list above). However, our impression is that work being done at these institutions is focusing more on the development of programs, and less on the development of a theory of Jewish Peoplehood that will guide the organization's work. We are not aware of any documents put out/published by these organizations or any public discussions which reveal a theory of Jewish Peoplehood and discuss the challenge and possibility for implementing that theory, including evaluation of goal attainment. The first author of this paper (Kopelowitz) has been involved in some initial discussion about creating a research and development framework at the Diaspora Museum, but our impression is that these ideas, as well as other plans for developing a theoretical vision to guide the Museum's work, are still in the preparatory stages.

³³ Other conferences on the topic of Jewish Peoplehood have also been held in the past few years. Of those that we are aware. In January 2007, The Institute for Contemporary Jewry at the Hebrew University held a conference titled, "The Contemporary Peoplehood of the Jews: Myth or Reality?" See: <http://ici.huji.ac.il/Shimoni1.pdf> . The UJA New York Federation and Beit Hatfusot ran a symposium on the topic of "Perspectives on Strengthening and Sustaining Jewish Peoplehood." in New York in 2006. The Wexner Heritage Foundation's 2005 Alumni conference was organized around the topic of Jewish Peoplehood.

Without the development of a coherent statement about the “why,” “how” and “what” of Jewish Peoplehood, it is unlikely that an organization will develop a strategic plan that successfully pulls together all aspects of its work under one umbrella. Again, we add an important caveat that we are not intimately familiar with the work being done in most of these organizations and may well be mistaken in our assessment of the work they are doing. Formal research is required to best/better understand how they are developing Jewish Peoplehood.

WHAT WE DO KNOW ABOUT THE PRACTICE OF JEWISH PEOPLEHOOD

A handicap faced by organizations that want to focus on Jewish Peoplehood is the lack of a developed body of social scientific research on the topic. For an organization that does not have the resources to employ intellectuals and practitioners with extensive experience in the area of Peoplehood, there are few articles and research studies to turn to in order to understand the nature of excellence in this field. Moreover, the literature that does exist is not easily accessible without knowing where to look.

Nevertheless, there is a small body of applied research that provides basic reading for anyone interested in understanding more about Jewish Peoplehood and how it plays out in organizational settings. While an effort should be made to collect existing research and organize it in an accessible way, and more research should be conducted, it is possible to gain important insights from work that has already been done.

The most developed area of research is around *mifgashim*, inter-group encounters between Jews of different backgrounds. The use of the *mifgash* as an educational tool was developed in the 1990s and is now a standard part of many programs in which Diaspora Jews visit Israel or Israeli Jews travel to the Diaspora (Kopelowitz 2003). Many of the intellectuals cited above view the people-to-people encounters that occur in *mifgashim* as a core component of the larger attempt to promote Jewish Peoplehood. Any professional involved in planning out a *mifgash* today has access to a wealth of information that outlines different theoretical understandings of how the *mifgash* works and the ingredients that contribute to success.³⁴

Besides the work done on *mifgashim*, there is no other body of research with a specific focus on Jewish Peoplehood. Rather, there is a scattering of research on different topics. Important sources are the websites of the Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies at

Brandeis³⁵ and the Research and Evaluation Unit of the Department of Education of the Jewish Agency.³⁶ The ethnographic work of Shaul Kelner³⁷ which is available for downloading on the Brandeis website, offers important insights into the pluses and minuses of the educational programs adopted by birthright Israel in order to promote a feeling among birthright participants that they belong to a common Jewish collective. Different projects carried out by Ezra Kopelowitz provide, in total, the most sustained attention by a researcher to questions of Jewish Peoplehood. The work includes evaluation of the Kolot Bavli-Yerushalmi program (Kopelowitz 2003b), the work of Israelis in summer camps (Kopelowitz 2003a, Wolf and Kopelowitz 2003), Israel education in North American Community Day schools (Kopelowitz 2004) and the work of Federation and other professionals who work in the area of Israel-Diaspora relations (Kopelowitz 2006b) and teacher training (Kopelowitz and Bar Shalom 2004). Kopelowitz (forthcoming) has pulled the different parts of his work together to offer “A Sociologist’s guide to building Jewish Peoplehood” that is aimed at educators and other Jewish professionals who want to understand the different dimensions involved in organizational and educational planning for Peoplehood.

To the best of our knowledge there is no research done on curricula development and pedagogy that is focused on Jewish Peoplehood. Beyond the work done by Mittelberg (2007, 2006) and Kopelowitz (2003a, 2006b) and this paper, there is no work that looks at global changes taking place in the Jewish world and its impact on Jewish public policy with a specific focus on the concept of Jewish Peoplehood.³⁸ Finally, we are unaware of research focused on the topic of Jewish Peoplehood outside of the United States and Israel.

³⁴ Recent examples of this literature include, Wolf (2007), Feldman and Katz (2002), Shmidt (2006).

³⁵ See: <http://www.brandeis.edu/cmjs/Project.cfm?idProject=1>

³⁶ See: <http://www.jafi.org.il/education/moriya/reports.html>

³⁷ See for example Kelner et. al. (2001).

³⁸ Dov Waxman of Baruch College, NY is currently working on a book on the topic of Jewish Peoplehood and Jewish foreign policy organizations.

IV. DOING JEWISH PEOPLEHOOD, WITHOUT RECOGNITION

This paper approaches the topic of Jewish Peoplehood in a narrow fashion, focusing only on those intellectuals and organizations making conscious use of the Peoplehood concept. The reason for this focus is the recent nature of the phenomenon, which requires attention and explanation. However, we must acknowledge the many organizations that do not consciously promote the “Jewish Peoplehood” concept, but their practice meets the intellectual criteria (see above) for “building Jewish peoplehood”. These are organizations that in some way actively pursue a communitarian (content oriented) and/or liberal (conversation oriented) agenda for promoting a connection between their constituents and other Jews.

The list of organizations that build Jewish peoplehood in practice, but do not use the term to describe what they do is a long one. Ways in which an organization might build Jewish peoplehood could include one or more of the following: (1) a board or membership structure that includes a broad segment of the Jewish community; (2) programs that bring together different segments of the Jewish community for the purpose of ceremony, celebration, or projects having to do with education, culture, welfare or social change and; (3) programs that evoke a connection to the Jewish community - local or global - that go beyond those immediately present and that impart a desire and ability to go out and meet other Jews.

Organizations that provide examples of these peoplehood type of activities, but don't evoke the concept of Jewish Peoplehood to describe their work, include: (1) community oriented organizations such as local Federations, Jewish Community Centers, community oriented adult education programs and synagogues; (2) formal collaborations between organizations such as the Federations and the Jewish Agency in Partnership 2000, or project based collaborations of the type promoted by the Joint Distribution Committee, or local carnivals co-sponsored by many communal organizations; (3) social change work that brings together Jews from different backgrounds such as American Jewish World Service, Avodah or Brit Olam; (4) think tanks and research institutes such as the Jewish People Policy Planning Institute or the Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies at Brandeis University and; (5) academic institutions with programs/departments in Israel studies, Jewish studies, Jewish history or contemporary Jewry with faculty from diverse backgrounds and course offerings that expose students to the diverse and complex nature of the Jewish experience.

Consideration of the common elements of “peoplehood oriented organizations” must be part of a policy discussion aimed at strengthening and shaping Jewish Peoplehood. These organizations build Jewish Peoplehood as an implicit outcome of their work. The nature of the organization and its goals either requires a board or membership structure or program development that brings together Jews of different types or exposes constituents to the Jewish world. The problem is that the unique characteristics of these “peoplehood oriented” organizations are not recognized as a distinct category requiring the development of special types of knowledge and skills for the purpose of successful management, board development, professional development, funding etc. Here is where a conscious effort must be made to bring together the theory and practice of Jewish Peoplehood.

V. CONCLUSIONS

The contribution of this paper is to make a first attempt at organizing existing knowledge, writing and research about Jewish Peoplehood. There is currently no similar statement and without it the development of a rational policy discussion about Jewish Peoplehood is impeded. We hope that this paper will contribute to such a discussion.

We have argued that Jewish Peoplehood is a unique historical concept (section one) with clear intellectual properties and competing schools of thought (section two) that when developed in a systematic way will serve as the basis for action by Jewish organizations (sections three and four). The paper covers the existing literature and provides an overview of organizations working in the field. We highlighted two existing cases, where a serious intellectual discussion about Jewish Peoplehood and organizational practices come together. In almost all other cases, the development of Jewish Peoplehood in the everyday work of organizations is at best done at the level of programming without the development of a coherent theory of practice. At worst, Jewish Peoplehood serves as a marketing slogan with no added value to the programs run by the organization, other than for fundraising purposes.

We argue that if organizations do not grapple with the “why,” “how” and “what” of Jewish Peoplehood it is unlikely that they will succeed in creating programs with enough coherency to create serious social impact. In the cases of organizations that do successfully build Jewish Peoplehood, the failure to recognize what they are doing as a unique and valuable activity means that we do not develop the field in terms of the skills and knowledge needed to successfully run peoplehood oriented organizations. Finally, we also provided a cursory look at the state of empirical research about Jewish Peoplehood that is available for those who seek to learn what others are doing, their understandings of the Peoplehood concept and which practices are more successful than others.

What we have not done in this paper is to discuss in detail the translation of the theory of Jewish Peoplehood into practice by Jewish organizations. What are the implications for organizational and program development? What are the similarities and differences between organizations that promote Jewish Peoplehood, but fall on different points of the spectrum of communitarian and liberal approaches to Peoplehood? How might we distinguish between more and less successful organizations and programs in this area? Answers to these questions require additional research, as well as a separate paper.

Following the research of Kelner and Kopelowitz, the work of the Oranim group and existing research on Mifgashim, it is clear that the development of Jewish Peoplehood practice requires a strategic development process that will match organizational practice to the Peoplehood vision the organization wishes to implement. We hope that the Nadav Fund and other funders will sponsor this type of research and organizational development work both for themselves and the organizations they fund in the future.

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