



Dear Readers,

We Jews have a complex identity. We are one people, but we live all over the world and in many ways. We want to live as Jews - whatever that may mean to us - but also to play an active role in our broader cultures and communities. These realities present us with a major challenge: how to create a sense of being one people when we are so diverse, so dispersed and so integrated into the non-Jewish world.

For Jewish life and culture to thrive in the long run, Jews - wherever and however they live - need a sense of shared identity. Recognizing our global “we” brings a depth to Jewish life that is missing when individuals and communities focus solely on personal identity or parochial concerns. This Jewish “we” has a very practical value too: when members of our people face hard times - political, economic or otherwise - they can rely on their brothers and sisters around the globe for partnership and support. Jewish Peoplehood is a term used to name this sense of the Jewish “we.”

As a philanthropist, I invest in Jewish Peoplehood through the NADAV Fund that I established because I believe it directly serves the Jewish future both spiritually and practically. I would even say that there won't be a Jewish future - at least as we have known Judaism - if this sense of shared identity is not widely developed among the younger generation. The question is how to develop it.

My answer is to support teaching, learning and experiences focused on the unique history and varied cultures of our people in the context of the values and principles that unite us as one people.

Beth Hatefutsoth, the Museum of the Jewish People, does this work through its exhibitions, programs and the International School for Jewish Peoplehood Studies. In fact, the school is a place where young Israelis and Jews from abroad can learn about the Jewish people and connect with one another. This kind of relationship building is very important.

On the pages that follow, you will find other people's reflections on the topic of Peoplehood. We hope they will get you thinking and that you bring these ideas back to your home communities and the important work you do there.

With best wishes,

**Leonid Nevzlin**  
Founder, NADAV Fund  
for the Advancement  
of Jewish Heritage;  
Chair, Beth Hatefutsoth  
International Board of Governors





Dear Readers,

After the creation of the State of Israel, Amir Gilboa wrote: “All of a sudden a man gets up in the morning and he feels he is a people, and he begins to walk.” Gilboa, I believe, captured what the event of the creation of the State meant for individual Jews. Our challenge is to figure out what will make Jews today get up, feel like a people and begin to walk.

In the last decade, Jewish Peoplehood has emerged as a core concept in our attempt to reinterpret our identity as Jews in this day and age (some may say the post-modern age). Concepts do not just appear out of nowhere. Their emergence usually signifies a certain need or gap that existing organizing concepts fail to address.

This is definitely the case with Peoplehood, which seems to address the neglected area of our complex identity as a collective in the days of a relatively free Jewish world with its own established Jewish sovereign entity - the State of Israel.

However, the concept of Peoplehood and its many uses seem to create more confusion than clarity. This is partly because there are different ways to understand the concept, but also because people, legitimately, bring their own biases and ideologies into the process. This publication is an attempt to both clarify some of the confusion and also to jumpstart a global Peoplehood conversation. It is our firm belief that the only way to provide a meaningful and relevant interpretation to Peoplehood is through a global dialogue.

Our attempt to further clarify the issue of Peoplehood led to addressing the next three questions which are the core chapters of this booklet:

**What** is Peoplehood?

**Why** is it important today?

**How** do we build Peoplehood “*Halachah Le’Maa’sseh*”?

We believe in exploring these dimensions of Peoplehood simultaneously as they are all gateways to Peoplehood interpretations.

We addressed these three questions through quotations from two dozen articles about Peoplehood, and added to them short responses (commentaries) from thirty Jews of various ages, backgrounds and geographical locations. Professor Arnie Eisen was kind enough to provide an opening. In the chapter that relates to Peoplehood *Halachah Le’maaseh* (How is Peoplehood done?), we focused on four institutional initiatives dedicated to advancing Jewish Peoplehood.

Finally, we provided a visual dimension to this booklet through the prism of the young participants of the Kivunim program who photographed Jewish life throughout the world. This is the place to thank them all.

We at the International School for Jewish Peoplehood Studies of Beth Hatefutsoth and the NADAV Fund hope that this model of a virtual global Jewish Town Hall meeting, to which more than sixty Jews contributed, will energize the Peoplehood conversation.

With best wishes for inspiring reading,

**Dr. Shlomi Ravid**

Director

The International School for

Jewish Peoplehood Studies,

Beth Hatefutsoth





# United as One People

## Professor Arnold Eisen

I have read hundreds of books and articles on the subject of Jewish Peoplehood - the most useful, I think, being those by Rabbis Mordecai M. Kaplan and Joseph D. Soloveitchik. I have even written a few pieces on the subject myself. Like most Jews, I know, however, that I have learned far more about the meaning of Peoplehood from personal experience. Here are just a few examples.

I'd be riding Egged busses during my student years in Israel in the mid-1970's, listening to the many accents in which Hebrew was spoken, looking at the incredibly varied set of faces, all so different from what I was used to, and it would hit me forcibly that these people somehow belonged to me. I was connected to them, even responsible for them. A common history and a common dream had brought us together in this Land. The feeling of connection was reinforced by our shared relief at having soldiers sitting beside us with guns on their laps. For we shared enemies who did not want us there, and perhaps wanted us dead, simply because of who we were: Jews.

I remember seeing the Isaiah Scroll on exhibit in the Shrine of the Book for the first time and realizing that I could read it, though it had been written and buried by Jews two thousand years ago. Gazing out at the desert hills from the Old City, caught as Isaiah had been between unforgiving sun and implacable rock, I could also better understand why he had written about God as he did. Holy, holy, holy. Jews had always known and taught that the earth is full of God's glory. I was heir to this tradition.

Years later, I saw a film in the Jerusalem Cinematheque about two rock musicians, children of Holocaust survivors, whose music bore witness to their family history. I knew at once that it was my story as well, even though my parents had been born in America. When the lights went on, debate about the unique centrality of Israel seemed academic. The last major chapter in our people's collective history had ended in the death camps. The current chapter was centered in Israel.

Two final memories. The day a few years ago when I discovered excitedly that one of the Argentinian relatives for whom my cousins and I had long been searching had an email address that ended with 'huji.ac.il'. We met at his apartment in Jerusalem, spoke rapidly in our common language, and learned that our academic fields were very close, that we knew many of the same colleagues. Our lives were on parallel tracks.

Last: the day I sat at lunch in Uruguay with forty young Jewish leaders from twenty-five countries. Most did not know Hebrew. We managed to communicate haltingly in English and Spanish. But we knew our connection was real and deep. History and faith, common stories and shared hopes, had made it so.

## The need for a tangible community

It strikes me, reflecting on Jewish Peoplehood in this year of Israel's 60th anniversary, that our fates as Jews are perhaps more united than at any time in recent memory. Terrorism and globalization know no borders. Israel is threatened, and Jews everywhere lose sleep. Many of our fondest Jewish traits and imaginings are shared as well. They emerge from age-old stories that we not only tell our children and grandchildren, but feel responsible for carrying on. These stories are far more than stories. We live them and try to live by them. We do

so despite the fact that we are barely on speaking terms with some members of the family and disagree with others on almost everything.

Indeed, some Jews are unable or unwilling to count others as Jews or their rabbis as rabbis or their Judaism as the real thing. These disputes will not go away any time soon. For this reason and others, the sense of shared Peoplehood is weakening among Jews in Israel and the Diaspora alike. In North America the problem is acute. Clearly, we need to talk to each other - honestly and at length - about what unites us despite all that divides.

We need to find things to do together that demonstrate the unity we talk about. Peoplehood seems to me the only viable candidate for a concept that can bring us together - Israelis with Diaspora Jews, "religious" with "secular" Jews, Orthodox with Conservative and Reform. It is the only organizing principle that reminds us that, despite real differences, the great bulk of Jews are united by history, narrative, obligation, family, common dreams and common enemies. Peoplehood, in my view, also unites us in shared responsibility.

It imposes today a common two-fold task. First, Jews in the Diaspora and Jews in Israel, Jews who call themselves religious and Jews who do not, need to work on building just and caring Jewish communities. Ethnic neighborhoods are rare in America and are no longer sufficient to sustain Peoplehood. Synagogues and JCC's are not enough. Israelis too require more than a sovereign State with a Jewish majority. Tangible community is needed: real connections, shared obligations, common

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projects, the hard work of realizing our people's age-old dreams of social justice, the establishment of God's kingdom on earth.

Second: We Jews have always been committed to living and teaching Torah. Right now this means making our tradition speak in radically new ways in the totally unprecedented conditions in which ALL of us live, wherever and however we are Jews. These teachings will be diverse. We can and must make sure that, whatever our differences, Torah remains the eternal and central story of our people and the source of the truths we offer to the world.

I believe that we will find common ground - or, better, overlap - among our various commitments if we look for it with honest commitment to the task. The obstacles are obvious. This is a time of great anxiety for Jews everywhere. But those active in Jewish life know that this is also a time of tremendous opportunity and achievement. That is certainly the case in Israel and North America.

The sixty essays collected here bear witness to the shared desire to accomplish still more together - united as one people, stronger in our differences, determined that the Jewish people live and its story live too, in and through every one of us.

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Prof. Arnold Eisen, a Jewish Studies scholar, is the Chancellor of the Jewish Theological Seminary in New York.