EDITORS' NOTE

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This book represents a dedicated endeavor to create an in-depth, scholarly response to the question: *"What is Jewish Peoplehood, and how might Jewish organizations consciously promote the connection between individual Jews and the Jewish People?"*

That this collection is a first attempt of its kind by intellectuals to address the question of "Jewish Peoplehood" should be regarded with surprise. After all, "the Jewish People" is an ancient idea and intellectuals have been pondering the nature of Jewish identity and belonging for centuries. However, as we wish to demonstrate in this foreword, the current usage of the term "Jewish Peoplehood" is very recent. This book is part of a wave of interest in the concept that constitutes, in itself, an innovation in both the English and Hebrew languages, as well as in the world of Jewish organizations.

This foreword describes the background story leading up to the publication of this book. We also look at how the particular story of this book falls within the larger story of the Jewish People in contemporary times, one which is generating an evident need to explore and reflect on the concept of Jewish Peoplehood.

Thinking and Doing Jewish Peoplehood

Whereas, prior to 2000, "Jewish Peoplehood," as a term, was rarely employed by Jewish organizations or intellectuals, today it is a central concept in the strategic planning of an increasing number of leading Jewish organizations. Conferences are being held about this concept and books are being written. Funders are allocating increasing sums of money to programs that adopt the Jewish Peoplehood concept, while leading Jewish organizations are drawing on Peoplehood as a central organizing concept.

At the time the chapters of this book were being written there was no serious body of intellectual work to match the increasing interest by Jewish organizations in the Peoplehood concept. Since 2006, two magazines have dedicated issues to the topic of Jewish Peoplehood, a position paper providing an overview of the field has been published, and there is the forthcoming

publication of a volume titled, "Conversations about Jewish Peoplehood."¹ The lack of an intellectual body of work, however, has led to growing gap between the applied use of the Peoplehood concept and the philosophical and sociological content of the term. To our dismay, we often hear our colleagues who are Jewish professionals state: "Our organization is committed to promoting Jewish Peoplehood, but we really aren't sure what Peoplehood is, or if the concept is really useful at the level of programming." We hope that after reading this book, you will agree that there is a world of content to the concept of Jewish Peoplehood.

In the ideal, frameworks should exist to bring the practical work of building Jewish Peoplehood into the same enterprise as those intellectuals who are thinking and writing about Jewish Peoplehood. However, to our chagrin, the worlds of "thinkers" and "doers" remain for the most part separate from one another. It is our concern that this book will be read, debated and mulched not only by other intellectuals, but also by those decision-makers and practitioners who are building Jewish Peoplehood on a daily basis in the worlds of culture education, media, politics, religion and elsewhere. Beyond that, we also wish to see a more sustained attempt to initiate discussions about the nature of Jewish Peoplehood, outside of intellectual gatherings and closer to the action of everyday life.

The process leading to the conference at which most of the papers in this book were presented was, in itself, an attempt to combine thinking with doing. The goal of the conference and the resulting book is to map out pathways for building Jewish Peoplehood. Each chapter in this book offers a different entry into the topic, with alternative worlds of content and cultural assumptions about the nature of the beast.

The conference was held at the initiative the *Israeli American Jewish Forum*. The *Forum* was the brain child of Marvin Lender (a prominent American Jewish lay leader) who, with Yossi Beilin (a prominent Israeli politician), created in 2000 a framework to facilitate dialogue between American and Israeli Jewish leaders. The *Forum* aimed to open communication and dialogue among key decision-makers and community leaders, including leading political figures, business people, philanthropists and scholars from Israel and the United States.

In 2003, the Forum initiated "the Jewish Peoplehood Project," with the UJA New York Federation and The Jewish Agency for Israel acting as co-sponsors. Marvin Lender and Dan Meridor were active in the process on behalf of the

¹ Beren, Susan. 2006. *Shma* Magazine issue on "Peoplehood and Justice" <http://www.shma.com/oct_06/archive.phtml>. Contact Magazine issue on "Jewish Peoplehood: What Does it Mean?" <http://www.jewishlife.org/pdf/spring_2008.pdf>; Kopelowitz, Ezra and Ari Engelberg. 2007. "A Framework for Strategic Thinking about Jewish Peoplehood," Tel Aviv: The Nadav Foundation; Galperin, Mikhail D. *Conversations about Jewish Peoplehood*, forthcoming.

Forum; John Ruskay and Alan Hoffmann respectively represented the UJA New York Federation and the Education Department of The Jewish Agency; Menachem Revivi coordinated the project on behalf of the Forum. As described by Ruskay in the Preface and Hoffmann in the Afterword to this book, the Peoplehood project is also situated within the matrix of additional discussions and strategic planning processes taking place in Israel and the United States.

The cornerstone event in the life of the Jewish Peoplehood Project was a conference in July 2005, in Israel, at which most of the authors who appear in this book contributed early versions of what became the book's chapters. Ezra Kopelowitz was charged, with the assistance of Neta Katz, at the Research Unit of the Department for Jewish Zionist Education of the Jewish Agency, to oversee the logistical and intellectual framework required for getting the process and resulting book off the ground.

The *Israeli American Jewish Forum* disbanded in 2006 and, with that, this particular phase of the Peoplehood project came to its conclusion. At this time, the UJA New York Federation and the Jewish Agency continued with the development of the next stages, as described in the Preface and Afterword to this book by John Ruskay and Alan Hoffmann, respectively.

The unique think tank and dialogue that the *Forum* sought to promote are now embodied in this book. In the same way that the various partners sought to bring a broad variety of Jewish leaders to a common table, so the process leading up to this book brought into a common discussion Jews from different backgrounds—Americans, Israelis and a European, from secular, traditionalist and different religious backgrounds. The outcome is Peoplehood in action. In order to think Peoplehood the conference upon which this book is based needed to do Peoplehood. Each author brings to the table a perspective grounded in the national, cultural and ideological background from whence he or she comes. The resulting meeting allows for a much broader intellectual horizon than could otherwise be attained. On one hand, as you read the chapters, a common set of themes emerges. These themes are addressed by Arnold Eisen in his keynote chapter. On the other hand, these common themes are taken in very different directions by each author, creating a intellectual experience of Jewish multi-culturalism par excellence.

A New Concept

We will leave the work of framing the intellectual content of the book to the keynote written by Arnold Eisen. Here, we want to take a step back and look the historical significance of this book. As we stated above, while the idea of "the Jewish People" is ancient, the concept of Jewish Peoplehood is new, both to the English and Hebrew languages. The significance of this book is that it aims to imbue this fledgling concept with intellectual content.

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 edition of the "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). In this volume, Ami Bouganim 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'."³ In a series of articles written after the establishment of the state, Kaplan frequently used the term Jewish Peoplehood. (Quoted from Bouganim, in this volume, pp. 84–85.)

Like the contemporary intellectual who is interested in the Peoplehood concept, Mordechai Kaplan sought a term that would allow him to describe the complex nature of Jewish belonging as he perceived it in post WWII America. However, it seems that, apart from Kaplan, there was no other sustained intellectual focus on the Jewish Peoplehood concept in the United States until after 2000.

Interest in the Peoplehood concept among Israelis is even more recent. In 2003, a group of Israeli educators requested permission from *The Academy of the Hebrew Language*,⁴ to use the term "amiut." They posited that existing Hebrew concepts, such as "*clal yisrael*," were too closely tied in to the Jewish religion in the minds of non-religious Israelis and that a term was needed that would capture the idea of belonging to the Jewish Peoplehood in a manner transcending religion. A representative of the Academy answered the query of Kopelowitz and Engelberg 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."

² Halkin, Hillel. "Peoplehood from the Jews?", in the *Jewish Forward*, June 11, 200 www.forward.com/articles/58274/

³ Kaplan, Mordechai. 1967 (1937). *Judaism as Civilization*, New York: Schocken Books., p. IX.

⁴ The official body charged by the State of Israel with creating new words for the Hebrew language.

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 sufficient 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 Hai Foundation, the American Jewish Committee and many other smaller organizations are either adopting the Peoplehood concept as an organizing principle in their organizations, or initiating high profile programming with an explicit focus on Jewish Peoplehood—all since 2000.

The thesis we wish to develop here is that the sudden take-up of the concept of Jewish Peoplehood by Jewish organizations stems from an ideological vacuum that developed in both the United States and Israel⁵, beginning in the 1970s, but whose impact is only now being felt.

"Ideology" denotes "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 are its characteristics? Major Jewish ideologies over the past two hundred years include variants of Zionism, religion, liberal humanism, and socialism, *inter alia*. 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 outcome has presented a serious problem for the leadership of Jewish organizations. Whether for fundraising, communal, educational or political work, all these organizations need to 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 viewed as a possible avenue for organizations to reach out to their constituents.

⁵ We are focusing on Israel and the United States, as this is where the Peoplehood discourse has taken off.

Jewish Belonging is No Longer Obvious

Jewish emancipation marks the entrance of Jews into the modern era and is a significant landmark 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, subsequently spreading across Europe over the course of the 19th century.

The granting of citizenship rights offered Jews the opportunity to leave the organized Jewish community (the *kehillah*) 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 or address 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 also brought a shift in the paradigms used by Jews to describe one another. Previously, Jewish belonging was organized by geography (e.g., Litvak vs. Galicianer). In the post-emancipation era, Jews began using labels like “Zionist,” “Socialist,” and “Religious,” as well as 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 offered convincing responses on to why they should continue to belong to the Jewish People. Jewish organizations could raise funds or recruit members based on the claim that they presented 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 already undermined, many of the moderate or centrist Jewish ideological movements. The nature of these changes are beyond the scope of this foreword,⁶ 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

⁶ For an overview of 20th century changes in American and Israeli society and their impact on Jewish identity and belonging see Kopelowitz, Ezra. 2005. “Jewish Identities.” In: *Modern Judaism: An Oxford Guide*, Editors: Nicholas de Lange and Miri Freud-Kandel. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 205–215.

participation in collective ceremonies as the primary markers of Jewish life.⁷ 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 else 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 at 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 and educators seek to provide compelling answers to their constituents about issues of Jewish belonging, and they are looking to the Peoplehood concept as one possibility.

The importance of the book before you is found within this historical setting. An examination of the Peoplehood concept provides insight into the intensive search taking place amongst Jewish moderates for a meaningful and vibrant framework for the organization of Jewish life in the 21st century. Each chapter in this book offers a looking glass into critical issues that face the Jewish center at the turn of the 21st century.

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⁷ See Gans, Herbert. 1994. “Symbolic Ethnicity and Symbolic Religiosity: Toward a Comparison of Ethnic and Religious Acculturation,” *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, Vol. 17 (October), pp. 577–592; and, Gans, Herbert. 1979. “Symbolic Ethnicity: The Future of Ethnic Groups and Cultures in America,” *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, Vol. 2 (January), pp. 1–20.

JEWISH PEOPLEHOOD

Change and Challenge